NATION

104-yr-old man's name 'under abjudication' in WB voter roll

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BUSINESS

Iran war wipes out Rs 16.32L cr from markets in 2 days

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SPORTS

India and England: Familiar foes seek another SF showdown

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US sinks Iran ship headed back from India

87 killed off Sri Lanka coast, 32 rescued; Saudi oil depot hit again; UAE's US Embassy bombed

TEHRAN, 4 MARCH

At least 87 people were killed after a US submarine struck and sank an Iranian warship in the Indian Ocean off Sri Lanka on Wednesday, Sri Lankan authorities said. Thirty-two survivors were rescued.

The Moudge-class frigate had recently attended the international maritime exercise hosted and conducted by the Indian Navy in Bay of Bengal from 18 to 25 February. It had made a port call at Visakhapatnam two weeks earlier.

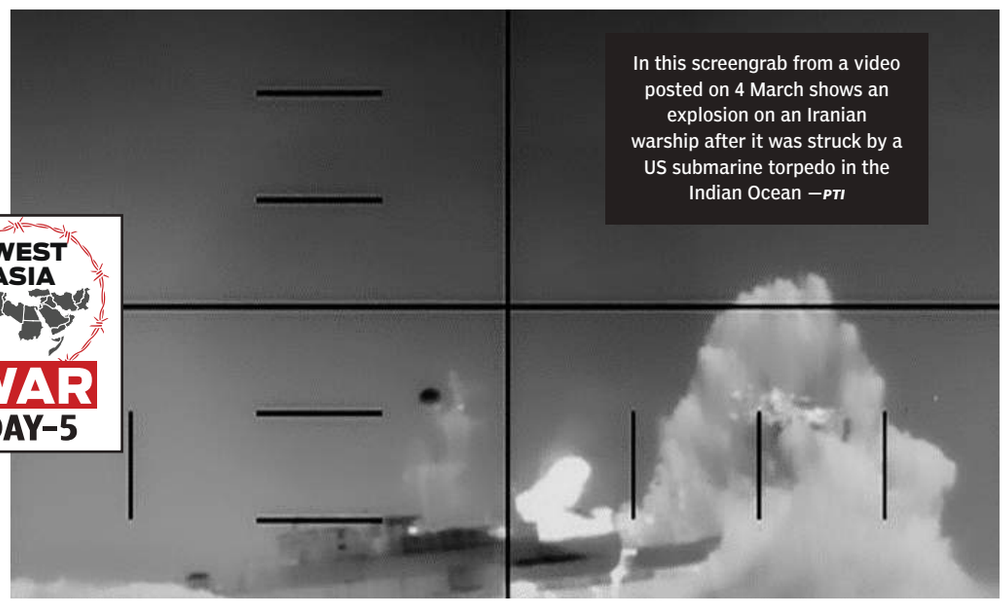
Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath told Parliament that the frigate, IRINS Dena, carrying 180 personnel, issued a distress call about 40 nautical miles off the coast before going down. Navy spokesman Commander Buddhika Sampath said rescuers found oil slicks, life rafts and sailors floating in the water.

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth confirmed that a torpedo fired from an American submarine sank the vessel near Sri Lanka's southern coast, describing it as Iran's "prized ship" and the first enemy vessel sunk by US torpedo since the Second World War. The US military earlier said it had destroyed 17 Iranian vessels and aimed to cripple Iran's navy.

One of Iran's newest warships, the Dena carried heavy guns, surface-to-air and anti-ship missiles, torpedoes and a helicopter.

In 2023, it undertook a high-profile tour with the support ship IRIS Makran.

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-5



In this screengrab from a video posted on 4 March shows an explosion on an Iranian warship after it was struck by a US submarine torpedo in the Indian Ocean —PTI

1,045 killed in Iran.

34 international flights cancelled from BLR airport

38 Indian ships stuck in Persian Gulf.

FIGHTING INTENSIFIES

The sinking came as US and Israeli forces intensified strikes on Iran for a fifth consecutive day. Israel said one of its F-35 jets shot down an Iranian YAK-130 fighter over Tehran and intercepted missile barrages, with explosions reported around Jerusalem. Iran postponed the mourning ceremony for Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, killed earlier in the conflict, citing the scale of attacks.

WEST ASIA ON BOIL

Tensions have also spread across the Gulf. Iran's Revolutionary Guard claimed full control of the Strait of Hormuz, through which about a fifth of global oil passes.

Saudi Arabia said its Aramco's Ras Tanura refinery, one of the world's largest, was targeted again by drones but suffered no damage. Drone attacks also hit the US Embassy in Saudi Arabia and the US Consulate in the UAE, prompting Washington to authorise the evacuation of non-emergency staff. In Kuwait, an Iranian drone strike on an operations centre killed six American soldiers.

Air sirens sounded in the morning across the island kingdom of Bahrain, home to the US Navy's 5th Fleet, and Qatar's Ministry of Defence said Iran launched two ballistic missiles against it. One hit Al-Udeid Qatari Base, but didn't cause casualties. Meanwhile, Turkey's Defence Ministry said NATO defences intercepted a ballistic missile launched from Iran before it entered Turkey's airspace. —PTI

>>>More on Pgs 2, 3, 5, 6, 7

Aadhaar cards found in M'luru riverbank

MANGALURU, 4 MARCH

Karnataka Legislative Assembly Speaker UT Khader has sought an inquiry after a large number of Aadhaar cards were found on the banks of the Nethravathi River at Farangipete in Pudu village, within his Mangaluru constituency. In a note dated 4 March to the Project Manager of the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), Bengaluru, Khader sought immediate intervention and action against those responsible. He said local residents spotted the cards scattered along the riverbank on 3 March. Following public information, the Pudu Gram Panchayat president and villagers collected the Aadhaar cards and alerted the Speaker and authorities. Expressing concern, Khader directed a thorough investigation to determine how the cards ended up in the river. —PTI

5 of family from Bengaluru killed in Andhra accident

PALAMANERU, 4 MARCH

Five members of a family including three women from Bengaluru died on the spot after the car in which they were travelling to Tirupati rammed into a stationary truck in Chittoor district on Wednesday, a police official said. The accident occurred on the four-lane highway near Palamaneru at around 8.45am on Wednesday while the family members were travelling from Bengaluru to Tirupati after their car rammed into a stationary truck near Palamaneru," the official told PTI. According to police, the accident is suspected to have occurred due to overspeeding and the driver possibly feeling sleepy. Meanwhile, relatives of the deceased have been informed and are on their way to the accident site, official added. —PTI

Man dies of cardiac arrest while playing Holi in UP

ETAWAH, 4 MARCH

A 29-year-old man collapsed and died while dancing at a Holi function in a village in Uttar Pradesh's Etawah. The doctor said prima facie the death appeared to have been caused by cardiac arrest. The incident took place when villagers had gathered to celebrate the festival with a DJ sound system set up in the locality. According to police, residents were dancing and singing in front of the DJ when Raj Kumar alias Tinku joined them. While dancing, he suddenly fell to the ground and became unconscious. Villagers rushed him to the 50-bed government hospital in Bakewar town, where the doctor on duty examined him and declared him dead, police said. —PTI

RAJASTHAN MAN MISSING AFTER MISSILE HITS TANKER NEAR OMAN

A man from Nagaur in Rajasthan has gone missing after an Iranian missile struck an oil tanker near Oman on 1 March.

Dalip Singh, a resident of Khinwatana village, was serving as a crew member on a tanker operated by Skylight Company. The vessel was stationed at Khasab Port when it was hit, causing heavy damage.

Dalip, who joined duty on 22 January, was in the forward section of the ship with Ashish Kumar from Bihar at the time of the attack. Kumar's body has been recovered, but Dalip remains untraceable, his brother Devendra Singh said.

The company informed the family that most crew were evacuated safely, but Ashish and two others, including Dalip, are missing. Dalip last spoke to his family on 28 February. Another Nagaur resident, Sunil Kumar, was also on board. —PTI

Opportunity to strike Iran came up after Modi left Israel: Envoy

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Israel's recent strikes on Iran were carried out during an "operational opportunity" that emerged shortly after Prime Minister Narendra Modi concluded his visit, Israel's Ambassador to India, Reuven Azar, has said.

In an interview with The Indian Express, Azar said the decision was not known during Modi's trip. Approval from Israel's security cabinet was secured on Saturday morning, and the operation was launched two days after Modi's departure.

Modi visited Israel on 25 to 26 February.

Meanwhile, Abdul Majeed Hakeem Ilahi, special representative of Iran's Supreme Leader, accused the US of fuelling conflicts to curb the rise of India, China and Russia. He alleged Washington seeks to maintain global dominance and prevent emerging powers from becoming equal partners. —Agencies

MEA ESTABLISHES CONTROL ROOM

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has set up a control room to assist Indians affected by the West Asia war, stressing that the safety of nearly one crore Indian nationals in the region is of "utmost priority". As the Iran-US conflict widened, the Indian Embassy in Iran shifted hundreds of students from Tehran to safer locations.

The control room operates from 9am to 9pm & can be contacted at 1800118797 and +91 11 2301 2113/4104/7905.

Nepal votes today in first election after Gen Z protests

KATHMANDU, 4 MARCH

Nepal will vote on Thursday in general elections, the first since a Gen Z-led protest movement toppled the K P Sharma Oli government last year.

A total of 18.9 million eligible voters will elect the 275-member House of Representatives. Of the 3,406 candidates contesting, 165 seats will be decided through direct voting and 110 through proportional representation. There are 10,967 polling booths and 23,112 polling centres nationwide. Voting will run from 7am to 5pm on 5 March, after campaigning ended at midnight on 2 March. A three-day public holiday has been declared.

The September youth protests forced Oli, chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), to resign despite his coalition's near two-thirds majority. Anti-corruption, good governance and generational change dominate the campaign. The Rastriya Swotantra Party (RSP), led by Ravi Lamichhane and Balendra Shah, and a reformist Nepali Congress faction led by Gagan Thapa back these demands. Oli's CPN-UML and Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda'-led Communist Party are seen as traditional forces. Smaller players include Ujyalo Nepal Party and Shram Shakti Party. RSP has projected 35-year-old Balen as its prime ministerial candidate. —PTI

>>>More on Page 5

Security personnel keep a vigil ahead of Nepal's parliamentary elections, at Durbar Square in Kathmandu on Wednesday —PTI

Finnish President lands in India for Raisina Dialogue

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The 11th edition of the Raisina Dialogue begins in the capital on Thursday, with Finnish President Alexander Stubb attending as Chief Guest and keynote speaker.

The dialogue is India's flagship conference on geopolitics and geo-economics,

President Stubb arrived on Wednesday for a four-day visit aimed at deepening India–Finland cooperation across trade, investment and critical technologies. Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed him, saying the visit would take bilateral ties to "new heights". The two leaders are scheduled to hold talks on Thursday,. The West Asia crisis is likely to figure prominently in discussions. The Raisina Dialogue 2026 runs from 5 to 7 March and will deliberate on shifting geopolitical alignments, climate change and AI. —PTI

>>>More on Page 3

DMK gives Cong 28 seats, 1 RS berth

CHENNAI, 4 MARCH

The ruling DMK and its ally Congress on Wednesday sealed a seat-sharing agreement for the forthcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, putting to rest speculation over strains in their alliance triggered by power-sharing demands from sections of the national party.

After several rounds of negotiations, the DMK allotted 28 of the 234 Assembly seats to Congress and also agreed to support the party with one Rajya Sabha seat in the March 16 biennial elections.

This is an increase from the 25 seats Congress contested in the 2021 elections. Congress had initially demanded for 34 seats, with 30 projected as a minimum compro-mise formula. —PTI

>>>More on Page 3

TN Congress President K Selvaperunthagai addresses the media after seat-sharing talks with DMK chief MK Stalin in Chennai on Wednesday—PTI

Bihar CM Nitish likely to file nomination for RS polls

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar is likely to file his nomination for the Rajya Sabha polls in Patna on Thursday, sources said, signalling that the state may soon have a new Chief Minister.

The JD(U) president is expected to submit his nomination alongside BJP National President Nitin Nabin in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah. Asked whether Kumar would also resign as Chief Minister, a source said it would happen "in due course".

If elected to the Rajya Sabha, the 75-year-old JD(U) veteran is unlikely to continue in the post. Sources indicated that his successor will be from the BJP. Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary and Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai are considered frontrunners. Kumar is Bihar's longest-serving Chief Minister and has taken oath a record 10 times, remaining in office since 2015. —PTI

>>>More on Page 3

FOR 4TH YEAR IN A ROW

BLR airport named world's best for arrivals

Terminal 2 handles all international flights and premium domestic carriers and is known for its lush greenery and aesthetics —PTI

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

Kempegowda International Airport has been ranked the 'Best Airport at Arrivals Globally' at the 2025 ASQ Awards by Airports Council International (ACI), marking its fourth consecutive win, officials said.

Passengers consistently report fast immigration, quick baggage delivery, and streamlined customs. Bangalore International Airport Limited, which operates the facility said the ACI Airport Service Quality programme is the world's leading benchmark for airport customer experience, measuring passenger satisfaction through globally standardised, in-journey surveys. The awards recognise airports that consistently perform well in service, comfort, convenience and cleanliness.

Travellers value predictability, speed and comfort, and we design our operations to deliver exactly that. By aligning every touchpoint from aircraft to kerb, we ensure a seamless and coordinated arrival experience." Terminal 2 also known as the "Garden Terminal" handles all international flights and premium domestic carriers (Air India, Vistara). It is praised for its lush greenery and modern aesthetics. —PTI

Yash's 'Toxic' postponed citing West Asia conflict

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

The release of 'Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups', starring Yash, has been postponed from 19 March to 4 June owing to rising tension across West Asia. This also allows it to avoid clash with Aditya Dhar's 'Dhurandhar: Part 2', slated for release on 19 March. Production banner KVN Productions and Yash's Monster Mind Creations shared the news in a statement on social media and noted that the Gulf region is a key market for the film's multi-language global roll-out. Directed by Geetu Mohandas, 'Toxic' is set in Goa from the early 1940s to the 1970s and stars Yash as gangster Raya. *—PTI*

Man absconding in dowry case nabbed after 10 yrs

KUNDAPUR, 4 MARCH

A 44-year-old man who had been absconding for nearly a decade in a dowry harassment case was arrested by the Kundapur Rural Police in West Bengal. The accused, Shashikant Shetty of Akkunje in Siddapur village, had married a local woman in 2015. The marriage reportedly broke down within six months over dowry-related disputes. Following a complaint by his wife, a case was registered at the Kundapur Rural Police Station, after which he went into hiding. A team led by ASI Shankar S and Head Constable Ashok Shetty traced him to Baninathpur in Murshidabad district and arrested him. During the investigation, police found that he had married another woman while absconding. He was produced before the First Civil Judge and JMFC court in Kundapur and remanded to judicial custody. He has been lodged at the district prison in Hiriyadka. *—Salar News*

MCC to conduct workshop for women & disabled

KUNDAPUR, 4 MARCH

The Mysuru City Corporation will organise a solar-powered workshop and livelihood exhibition titled "Special-Abled and Women's Progress Path" at Sri Rangacharlu Town Hall on 6 March at 9.30am. The event aims to create employment opportunities and improve the economic status of women and persons with disabilities. The Commissioner, after releasing the posters, highlighted that 5 per cent of the corporation's grants are reserved for persons with disabilities and stressed their use for livelihood training. Organised with SELCO Foundation, the programme will focus on skill development for self-employment using solar-powered machinery in agriculture, animal husbandry, and manufacturing. A "Clean Mysuru" Roadshow is scheduled for 8 March, coinciding with International Women's Day, featuring rallies, vintage cars, and waste management demons trations.*—Salar News*

KERC hikes commercial, industrial electricity tariffs

Slashes tariffs for farmers, says hikes to maintain subsidies

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

The Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission has increased tariffs for select commercial and industrial consumers by 10 paise to a maximum of 95 paise per unit while reducing electricity tariffs for agricultural pump sets for 2025–26 from the earlier uniform rate of Rs 8.30 per unit to a range of Rs 6.57 to Rs 7.79 per unit across the State.

As per the Commission's order, the revised tariffs are as follows: LT-3a (low-tension commercial) consumers will pay a fixed charge of Rs 235 per kW and an energy charge of Rs 7.10 per unit, while LT-5 (industrial) consumers will be charged Rs 165 per HP as fixed charges and Rs 5.20 per unit as energy charges.

In the high-tension segment, HT-2a (industrial) consumers will pay a demand charge of Rs 365 per kVA and an energy charge of Rs 6.70 per unit, while HT-2b (commercial) consumers will pay Rs 390 per kVA as demand charges and Rs 6.90 per unit as energy charges.

The order followed a review petition filed by five State-run electricity supply companies — Bangalore Electricity Supply Company, Mangalore Electricity Supply Company, Chamundeshwari Electricity Supply Corporation, Hubli Electricity Supply Company and Gulbarga Electricity Supply Company.

The order, however, does not specify the date from which the revised tariffs will come into effect.

In its earlier tariff order dated 27 March, 2025, the Commission had fixed the LT-4a tariff uniformly at Rs 8.30 per unit across all ESCOMs.

Consumers in the LT-4a category — primarily agricultural pump set users — are provided free power supply, with the State government reimbursing the cost through subsidies.

KERC noted that despite the State government allocating Rs 16,021 crore in subsidies for free power to farmers, distribution companies would face a shortfall, leading to "unexpected and undue hardship". The tariff reduction for agriculture would create a revenue gap of Rs 2,362.47 crore.

The government has agreed to provide additional support of Rs 2,362.47 crore, while ESCOMs will mobilise Rs 1,107.60 crore through miscellaneous revenue. *—PTI*

'UNAUTHORISED PROTESTS'

Cases filed over pro-Khamenei marches at Karnataka

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

Days after a procession to protest Iranian leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's assassination was held, Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday said cases were registered against those violating rules.

Parameshwara said that the government has taken a firm stance on the processions and said that permission is required for any gathering in the city.

"They can't out procession in Bengaluru without permission. We have registered cases and will not allow them to come to the streets," the Karnataka minister told reporters.

Women of the Shia Muslim community took out the protest march.

Members of the All India Shia Council on Sunday held a procession in Chikkamagaluru. The protestors mourned the death of Khamenei and raised slogans against the US and Israel.

Police had also deployed additional staff in the area to ensure public safety. *—ANI*

34 international flights cancelled from KIA

At least 34 international flights were cancelled at Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) on Wednesday as the ongoing West Asia conflict disrupts airline operations. The cancellations impacted several key international sectors connecting Bengaluru with West Asian cities, including Abu Dhabi, Riyadh, Jeddah, Dammam, Dubai, and Doha. Officials said 18 arrivals and 16 departures were cancelled due to airspace restrictions until 11.59 pm on 4 March.

FESTIVAL OF COLOURS

Youngsters gleam with joy as they gather to celebrate Holi at Sheshadripuram in Bengaluru *–MOHAMMED ASAD*

Fill govt vacancies considering internal reservation: BJP Prez

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

State BJP President **BY Vijayendra** on Wednesday urged the Congress government to fill vacancies by considering internal reservation among SCs. The government should not cite court-related technicalities as an excuse, he said, warning that the BJP would launch an intense agitation otherwise.

The State government decided to conduct recruitment for 56,432 vacant jobs based on the reservation order in force before 28 December, 2022 (15 per cent for SCs and 3 per cent for STs), due to the stay on the enhanced quota and internal reservation, while continuing to pursue its case in court.

The previous BJP government had increased the reservation quota for SCs from 15 per cent to 17 per cent and for Scheduled Tribes from 3 per cent to 7 per cent, raising the State's total reservation to 56 per cent, exceeding the Supreme Court-mandated 50 per cent ceiling. While this is still in court, the Congress government decided to provide internal reservation within the 17 per cent quota for SCs based on the 6:6:5 formula.

Vijayendra said, "Whether you fill over 50,000 vacant posts or 1 lakh posts is up to you. Our demand is to fill all vacant posts."

PROTESTS ON BUDGET DAY

Vijayendra said that a series of protests will begin in Bengaluru from 6 March, when the State legislature's Budget session starts, criticising the government for failing to fulfill its promises. The protest would range from Anganwadi and ASHA workers to contractors and transport corporations' employees, he said. *—PTI*

Hindu activist stabbed in Udupi, 5 arrested

A leader of a Hindu organization was stabbed by a youth during an alleged dispute over a relationship issue near Malpe beach in Malpe in Udupi district on the night of 3 March, police said.
The victim, Manju Kola had reportedly gone to mediate in a dispute between a couple over a love affair. The argument son escalated into violence. During the altercation, a youth allegedly stabbed him with a knife. Kola is the husband of former Udupi City Municipal Council vice-president Lakshmi Manjunath. Kola sustained injuries in his abdomen and collapsed on the spot. He was immediately shifted to a private hospital in Udupi. Doctors treating him said that his condition is stable. The police have arrested five people in connection with the incident.Superintendent of Police Hariram Shankar said that preliminary investigation indicates the attack stemmed from personal reasons and has no communal angle.
He also urged the public not to spread rumours regarding the incident.

Will RaGa address SC/ST funds theft: Ashoka

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

Accusing the Siddaramaiah-led government of diverting funds meant for the development of SC/ST communities to fund its guarantee schemes, BJP leader **R Ashoka** questioned Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's silence on what it termed as "SC/ST Funds Chori".

The Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly accused the government of "stealing" from the SC/ST community, to fund their "hollow promises". In a post on X on Wednesday, Ashoka asked how a government can allegedly divert Rs 39,000 crore meant for the Scheduled Caste Sub-Plan (SCSP) and Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) while still pretending to care about equity and social justice. He said this left a "measly Rs 7,000 crore for actual development".

Ashoka urged Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to give a "concrete commitment" to stop this serial misuse of funds in his budget speech on 6 March, or face the "absolute fury" of the people.

"This is no longer a temporary fiscal adjustment; it is a calculated, year-on-year loot of the resources that belong to the Dalit and Tribal communities of Karnataka. To fund their hollow promises, they aren't just borrowing, they are stealing from the very sections of society they claim to protect," Ashoka said.

BJP stands in total solidarity with the 70+ organisations ready to fight this institutionalised injustice, Ashoka said, "Touch the SCSP/TSP funds again, and we will make sure this Budget burns in the fires of public outrage." *—PTI*

Govt to probe KPSC exam irregularities

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

Amid allegations of irregularities in the KPSC Mains examination and selection process, State Minister Parameshwara stated that the government would investigate the matter and ensure a fair system for candidates. He added that it would be better if issues were addressed promptly within the Karnataka Public Service Commission.

Questions have been raised about the transparency of the selection process following the results for Gazetted Probationers (Group A and B) for 384 posts. Allegations include that over 10 to 15 candidates with consecutive serial numbers, seated together at the same exam centre, have cleared the exam. Some candidates from the same family are also believed to have qualified.

The Home Minister acknowledged complaints against KPSC and KEA (Karnataka Examinations Authority), stating, "If the complaints are as serious as alleged, we will examine them and ensure a fair system for candidates." He noted that despite previous reforms, responsibility must be taken if irregularities persist.

Candidates have been shortlisted for interview, with some demanding a probe and withholding of results to ensure justice. BJP leader BY Vijayendra said his party would raise the issue in the Assembly session. *—PTI*

Fire breaks out in Nandi Hills

CHIKKABALLAPURA, 4 MARCH

A wildfire broke out at the famous Nandi Hills in Chikkaballapura taluk late on Tuesday evening, triggering a swift response from police and forest officials.

The blaze was first noticed around 8.15 pm by personnel attached to the Nandi Hills police station, who immediately alerted the Forest and Fire departments. Officials rushed to the spot to contain the

flames. Vijayakumar, Deputy Range Forest Officer (DRFO), Chikkaballapura, said he received information around 9.15 pm and reached the site with his team.

The fire was brought under control after nearly an hour of efforts, using tree branches and fire-fighting equipment. He noted that although fire lines had been laid at strategic points, the blaze crossed one such barrier and damaged a few trees.

Ramesh, Special Officer, Nandi Hills, said security personnel had monitored visitor movement till dusk, with no signs of fire earlier in the day. Authorities will investigate whether the incident was accidental or the result of mischief. *—Salar News*

BJP POWER TUSSLE

Dissent brews as BSY picks candidates 2 yrs ahead of polls

DHARWAD, 4 MARCH

Fresh signs of factionalism have surfaced in Karnataka BJP with senior leader and Parliamentary Board member BS Yediyurappa drawing criticism for announcing prospective candidates for the 2028 General Assembly elections.

At a function held in Honnali on 28 February, to mark the birthday of former minister MP Renukacharya, Yediyurappa publicly named likely candidates for several assembly constituencies in Davanagere district. The move has triggered resentment among local party leaders, who have termed it "a violation of party protocol" and demanded that the announcement be withdrawn.

Leaders argue that candidate selection is the prerogative of the BJP's central parliamentary board and not to be declared unilaterally at public events. Some have also alleged that instead of resolving internal differences, Yediyurappa's actions have deepened factional divides.

The district unit has reportedly been faction-ridden from the last Lok Sabha elections, with groups aligned to former MP GM Siddeshwara and Renukacharya at odds. Former chief minister

Jagadish Shettar had been tasked with reconciling the factions, though with limited success.

Voicing dissent publicly, BJP's former district general secretary Shantaraj Patil said he had not expected such a breach of organisational discipline from a senior leader.

A protest meeting has been convened on 5 March by another faction of the district unit, led by GM Siddeshwara and MLA BP Harish, to raise the issue before party leadership. The matter may also be brought to of State in-charge Radha Mohan Singh.

What BSY announced

The candidates announced by Yediyurappa are MP Renukacharya from Honnali, Madal Virupakshappa from Channagiri, Chandrashekar Pujari from Harihar, Lokikere Nagaraj from Davanagere North, SV Ramachandra from Jagalur, Karunakara Reddy from Harapanahalli—*Salar News*

Govt panel backs making Tulu official language

BENGALURU, 4 FEB

A high-level committee constituted by the Karnataka government has backed the proposal to grant second official language status to Tulu after studying the framework adopted by Andhra Pradesh for recognising Urdu.

The six-member panel, headed by **KM Gayatri**, former Director of the Kannada and Culture Department, examined the legal and administrative procedures followed by the Andhra Pradesh government before according second official language status to Urdu. Officials said the committee visited the Andhra Pradesh Secretariat on January 19 and 20 and held consultations with senior functionaries to understand implementation mechanisms and statutory provisions.

The panel included Tharanatha Gatti Kapikad, president of the Karnataka Tulu Sahitya Academy, in an advisory capacity.

The report, along with a note detailing Tulu's linguistic and cultural significance, was submitted to J Manjunath, Secretary, Kannada and Culture Department, at Vikas Soudha in Bengaluru. *—PTI*

DMK gives Congress 28 Assembly seats

Cong also got 1 RS berth; This marks an increase from the 25 seats Cong fought in 2021

CHENNAI, 4 MARCH

The ruling DMK and its ally Congress on Wednesday sealed a seat-sharing agreement for the forthcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, putting to rest speculation over strains in their alliance triggered by power-sharing demands from sections of the national party.

After several rounds of negotiations, DMK allotted 28 of the 234 Assembly seats to Congress and agreed to support it with one Rajya Sabha seat in the 16 March biennial elections. This is an increase from the 25 seats Congress contested in the 2021 polls.

The agreement was formalised at the DMK headquarters, Anna Arivalayam, by DMK president and Chief Minister MK Stalin and Tamil Nadu Congress Committee President K Selvaperunthagai. Veteran Congress leader and former Union Minister P Chidambaram had on Tuesday joined Selvaperunthagai in negotiations with the DMK leadership.

TNCC President K Selvaperunthagai, Congress seat-sharing committee leader Girish Chodankar at Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam headquarters —PTI

The tie-up was recently under strain amid reports of Congress insisting on a larger seat share and a role in government. Some senior leaders, including Virudhunagar MP Manickam Tagore, had publicly pushed for greater power-sharing, prompting sharp exchanges between leaders of both parties. DMK maintained that cabinet berths for allies were not feasible.

Speculation had also intensified over a possible Congress understanding with actor Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK). However, both DMK and Congress leaders parried questions on power-sharing after finalising the pact.

The DMK, which leads the 21-party Secular Progressive Alliance, has also allotted one Rajya Sabha seat each to Congress and Premalatha Vijayakant-led DMDK. It fielded sitting MP Tiruchi Siva and party spokesperson Professor J Constantine Ravindran for the Upper House polls.

Meanwhile, actor-politician Kamal Haasan's Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) held seat-sharing talks with the DMK. MNM general secretary A Arunachalam said the party had presented details to the DMK committee led by treasurer TR Baalu on how it could strengthen the alliance.

Assembly polls are expected in April. The DMK-Congress combine has won three successive elections since 2019, including a sweep of all 39 Lok Sabha seats in 2024 and the lone Puducherry seat. —PTI

GIVE A CHANCE TO RULE, SAYS VIJAY

THANJAVUR 4 MAR

Appealing to Tamil Nadu's voters to give him a chance to rule the state, TVK founder Vijay on Wednesday said the upcoming polls are not a mere election, but an "oceanic emotion" for him.

Addressing a party functionaries' meet here, the TVK chief appealed to the people of Tamil Nadu to give him a chance in the coming elections.

"It may seem an ordinary election for others, but for me and the people loving me, it is an emotion, an oceanic emotion," Vijay said about the Assembly polls, likely in April.

Sharpening his attack against DMK and its Chief Minister M K Stalin, he said that their assertion of forming the government for a second time in a row after the polls will not fructify as even late party patriarch M Karunanidhi could not achieve it.

On Wednesday, in addition to his trademark white shirt and mild brown pants, the actor-politician was seen wearing a green towel around his neck, signifying the agrarian context of this Cauvery delta district, often called Tamil Nadu's "rice bowl". Farmers and farmer unions traditionally sport this green towel.

He further said that the TVK's election symbol "whistle" should resonate in every house. —PTI

Manipur: 2 DyCMs, and ministers assume charge

IMPHAL, 4 MARCH

A month after their swearing-in ceremony, two Manipur deputy chief ministers and two ministers were allotted portfolios on Wednesday, according to a government notification said.Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh is yet to be allotted "any specific department" while Deputy CM Nemcha Kipgen, who belongs to the Kuki community, has been entrusted with the responsibility of rural and panchayati raj development, along with hill and tribal affairs, it said.

Another Deputy Chief Minister L Dikho, who is a leader of the Naga People's Front, has been assigned to the public health engineering and forest, environment and climate change departments, according to the government notification. —PTI

—ANI

AI Summit shirtless protest case: IYC Chief released

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Indian Youth Congress (IYC) President Uday Bhanu Chib, who was arrested for his "shirtless protest" at the AI Impact Summit last month, has been released from Tihar jail, sources said on Tuesday. This follows the Delhi High Court's decision to reinstate Chib's bail, overturning a lower court's stay. Chib's first statement after being released was that the party stands firmly against the India-US trade deal. Visuals recorded outside Tihar jail showed jubilant IYC members lifting Chib on their shoulders as he walked out. Supporters raised slogans such as "PM is compromised" and "Roll back India-US trade deal". Chib was sent to four-day police custody by a trial court on 24 February over shirtless protest. —PTI

Curbs remain in Kashmir over Khamenei's death

SRINAGAR, 4 MARCH

Strict restrictions remained imposed in many areas of Kashmir for the third consecutive day on Wednesday following massive protests across the valley against the killing of Iran's Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, officials said. As a precautionary measure, the government shut educational institutions till Saturday, while mobile internet speed continued to remain throttled. The iconic Ghanta Ghar in the city centre of Lal Chowk here continued to remain a no-go zone."Restrictions on the movement and assembly of the people continued. Wednesday," the officials said. Mobile internet speeds continued to remain throttled. Restrictions were being enforced in areas with concentration of Shia population. —PTI

BATTLE WITH BJP

Cong ally Raijor Dal picks 11 candidates for Assam elections

GUWAHATI, 4 MARCH

Opposition party Raijor Dal announced its first list of 11 candidates for the upcoming Assam Assembly elections on Wednesday, a day after the Congress revealed its 42 nominees.

Although initially part of a Congress-led alliance, the seat-sharing agreement remains unresolved. The list, signed by President Akhil Gogoi, includes Abdur Rashid Mandal, a Congress MLA who joined Raijor Dal on 16 February, and has been nominated from Goalpara East. Gogoi, who won Sivasagar as an Independent last election, is not named in this list. In Margherita, Gogoi's party nominated Rahul Chetry, while Congress named Prateek Bordoloi. Ramen Chandra Borthakur has been chosen for Jalukbari, represented by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. Gyanashree Bora will contest Mariani, previously held by BJP MLA Rupjyoti Kurmi, who switched from Congress in 2021. Other candidates include Anjan Talukdar, Azizur Rahman, Mehboob Muktar, Alok Nath, Dulal Chandra Boruah, Lakhyajyoti Gogoi, and Ratan Dao. The Assam elections are scheduled for April, following the 2023 delimitation exercise. —PTI

- Gogoi's party nominated Rahul Chetry, while Congress named Prateek Bordoloi. Ramen Chandra Borthakur has been chosen for Jalukbari, represented by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma

Cong backs Sharad for RS polls

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

The Congress on Wednesday declared its support to Nationalist Congress Party (SP) chief Sharad Pawar as the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) candidate for Rajya Sabha polls from Maharashtra, where the Opposition bloc is in a position to win one of the seven seats falling vacant.

AICC general secretary Ramesh Chennithala told PTI that the Congress leadership has conveyed to him about the decision to support Pawar, a sitting Rajya Sabha MP, in the March 16 polls to the Upper House of Parliament from Maharashtra.

The Congress decision to support the former Union minister for a fresh Rajya Sabha term comes a day before the last date (March 5) for filing nomination papers for the biennial elections.

Earlier, all three MVA allies - Congress, NCP (SP) and Shiv Sena (UBT) - had staked claim to the lone seat the Opposition alliance can win from the state given their strength in the assembly. —PTI

India supports Myanmar-led peace process: EAM Jaishankar

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

India backs a Myanmar-led and Myanmar-owned peace process aimed at achieving lasting peace and development in the Southeast Asian nation, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar announced on Wednesday. Speaking virtually at the inauguration of the Sarsobeikman Literary Centre in Yangon, he emphasised the importance of Myanmar as a strategic neighbour sharing a 1,640km border with Indian states including Nagaland and Manipur, which face militancy challenges.

Jaishankar highlighted that Myanmar is central to India's three key foreign policy priorities: 'Neighbourhood First', 'Act East', and MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions). He noted that India's engagement with Myanmar spans political, trade, security, and cultural cooperation, with a focus on people-centred development aimed at strengthening local economies and improving lives.

He stated that India, as the world's largest democracy with 1.4 billion people living in peace and harmony, has shared its experiences in federalism and constitutionalism with Myanmar stakeholders. The minister underlined the long-standing bonds of spirituality, kinship, geography, language, and literature that have united the two nations for centuries.

He said Myanmar's ongoing protests underline the need for an inclusive political process. —PTI

BJP names Tawde, Athawale for Maharashtra RS polls

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

The BJP announced four candidates on Wednesday for the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections from Maharashtra, including Union Minister Ramdas Athawale and former state minister Vinod Tawde. Polling will be held on 16 March, with counting scheduled the same day.

Earlier, Athawale met Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis at his official residence, Varsha, in south Mumbai in connection with the Rajya Sabha polls, a source said.

The BJP has also fielded former Nagpur mayor Maya Chintaman Ivnate and ex-legislative council member Ramrao Wadkute. Ivnate, a former mayor, currently serves as a corporator in the city's civic body.

Seven Rajya Sabha seats from Maharashtra are set to fall vacant in April this year. The BJP-led Mahayuti alliance is in a position to ensure the election of all its four nominees.

The Election Commission has announced polls for 37 Rajya Sabha seats across 10 states, including 12 held by the NDA and 25 by the opposition. Members are elected by MLAs through proportional representation. —PTI

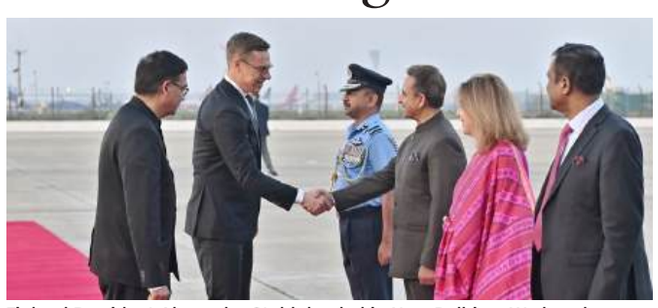
Finnish Prez visit to strengthen bilateral ties: PM

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Finnish President Alexander Stubb began a four-day visit to India on Wednesday to strengthen bilateral cooperation in trade, investment, and critical technology. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Stubb's visit will take India-Finland relations to "new heights".

Stubb will hold talks with Modi on Thursday to finalise several Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) aimed at boosting cooperation across various sectors. The crisis in West Asia is also an expected topic of discussion in the meeting.

"Welcome to India, President Alexander Stubb...your visit will take India-Finland relations to new heights. I eagerly look forward to our meeting tomorrow and to your keynote address at the Raisina Dialogue 2026," Modi wrote on X.



Finland President Alexander Stubb landed in New Delhi on Wednesday —X/MEAINDIA

Modi was responding to Stubb, saying, "The visit will further strengthen the relations between Finland and India, including in the area of trade."

President Stubb was accorded a ceremonial welcome and a Guard of Honour on Wednesday morning, and was received by Minister of State for External Affairs KV Singh at the airport. The Finnish President will also attend the inaugural session of the Raisina Dialogue as a chief guest on Thursday, where he will give the Keynote speech.

He will also meet President Droupadi Murmu and Vice President CP Radhakrishnan. Stubb's visit to India comes weeks after Finland's Prime Minister Petteri Orpo travelled to New Delhi for the AI Impact Summit.

Stubb is accompanied by a high-level delegation comprising ministers, senior officials and business leaders. He is scheduled to travel to Mumbai on Friday to meet several business leaders, before leaving on Saturday. —PTI

VSR BEING SHIELDED IN BARAMATI PLANE CRASH, ALLEGES ROHIT PAWAR

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

NCP (SP) MLA Rohit Pawar has alleged that efforts are underway to shield VSR Ventures in connection with the plane crash near Baramati that killed Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar. He claimed the AAIB's preliminary report supports his earlier doubts. Pawar accused VSR of grave lapses in the past and criticised the investigation's thoroughness.

The Learjet 45, operated by VSR Ventures, crashed on January 28 near Baramati airstrip, with the aircraft hitting the ground and killing Ajit Pawar and four others. The AAIB's 22-page report stated that visibility was below required levels, and flagged fading marks and loose gravel on the runway.

Pawar citing discrepancies in the report such as the mention of Baramati as a district and claiming the aircraft did not hit trees, only a small bush.

He also pointed out past irresponsibility by VSR Ventures, citing an incident involving Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's aircraft entering Iranian and Iraqi airspace without permission, which allegedly prompted warnings from fighter jets. Pawar sought a proper probe. —PTI

CPI(M) veteran Sudhakaran won't renew membership

ALAPPUZHA, 4 MARCH

Veteran CPI(M) leader G Sudhakaran announced on Wednesday that he will not renew his party membership. His decision to cut the decades-long ties with the CPI(M) comes as Kerala is gearing up for the Assembly polls.

Sudhakaran said his decision is based on neglect by the Marxist party's state and district leaders. He said he does not wish to inconvenience them by staying in the party.

However, the veteran didn't say if he would quit the ruling party or join another. Sudhakaran has long had strained ties with the CPI(M) leadership and has repeatedly criticised party leaders in public. Sudhakaran served as PWD minister from 2016 to 2021. —PTI

CHANGE OF GUARD, AGAIN?

Nitish's likely RS entry sparks rumours of new CM in Bihar

PATNA, 4 MARCH

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar is likely to file his nomination for the Rajya Sabha polls in Patna on Thursday, according to sources, indicating the state may get a new CM.

The JD(U) president will file his nomination alongside BJP national president Nitin Nabin in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, they said.

"JD(U) president Nitish Kumar and BJP national president Nitin Nabin will file their nomination for the Rajya Sabha elections on Thursday. Home Minister Amit Shah will remain present on the occasion," a source in the NDA said.

Asked if Kumar will also resign as Bihar chief minister, the source said it will happen in due course of time.

Earlier, rumours circulated on Wednesday that Bihar's long-serving Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, leader of the JD(U), may move to the Rajya Sabha, potentially paving the way for the BJP to install its candidate as chief minister, with Kumar's son Nishant as deputy.

Nitish Kumar —PTI

However, Union Minister Giriraj Singh dismissed these rumours as a "Holi prank," emphasising that Nitish Kumar remains the chief minister. The speculation about Kumar, who has turned 75 this month, surfaced a day after his son Nishant's decision to enter the state politics was announced. —PTI

Jagan flays Naidu on TTD chief's obscene video

AMARAVATI, 4 MARCH

YSRCP supremo YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Wednesday alleged that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu had compromised the sanctity of TTD by appointing individuals facing serious allegations as chairman of the temple trust.

His remarks came after an inappropriate video featuring TTD chairman BR Naidu allegedly with a woman went viral.

The opposition leader claimed that administering the TTD temples, where Lord Venkateswara is worshipped by crores of devotees in India and abroad as the living deity of the Kali Yuga, required individuals with impeccable character, devotion and integrity.

"By appointing individuals facing serious allegations as chairman of the TTD, Chandrababu Naidu has undermined the sanctity and credibility of the temple administration," Reddy said in a post on 'X'.

The former CM alleged that even before the assembly elections in 2024, a woman had written to the TDP chief Naidu accusing the current TTD chairman of cheating her and harassing women who approached him for assistance. B R Naidu is said to be a close associate of the TDP supremo.

Responding to the allegations, the TTD Chairman criticised Reddy, questioning his moral authority to speak about Hindutva and the sanctity of Tirumala. —PTI

'Oppn misleading public on fuel shortage, price hike'

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The BJP on Wednesday alleged that some sections in the opposition are running a "misinformation campaign" to create panic through claims of fuel shortages and price spikes amid a 'war-like situation' in West Asia.

The party asked not to be swayed by the claims.

The ruling party asserted that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government has ensured that people in India are protected from supply shocks and runaway fuel inflation, despite "global instability".

"Amid the war-like situation in West Asia, sections of the opposition are running a misinformation campaign to create panic around fuel shortages and price spikes. There is no need to be swayed," BJP IT department head Amit Malviya said in a post on X.

Malviya said India has built a "resilient, diversified and forward-looking" energy security framework over the past decade.~ —PTI

2 die by suicide after WB SIR voter roll publication

KOLKATA, 4 MARCH

STwo individuals in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri and South 24 Parganas districts have allegedly died by suicide due to "mental stress" following the publication of the final voter list after the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), officials said.mRafiq Ali Gazi, 44, was found hanging in his South 24 Parganas home on Wednesday morning. His name was in the "under abjudication" category, and his family claimed he was under severe mental stress. In another incident, Gouranga De, 62, a momo seller in Jalpaiguri, was found hanging on Tuesday. His wife said he was extremely anxious after his name appeared in the 'deleted' category in the final list published on 28 February. he TMC stated: "Gouranga De took his own life after the @ECISVEEP's SIR deleted his name despite nearly four decades of faithful voting."—*PTI* . Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777

Eminent scribe, ex-ambassador HK Dua dies at 88

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Eminent journalist HK Dua, who held the rare distinction of helming editorial operations at three of India's leading newspapers, passed away on Wednesday at the age of 88. He breathed his last this afternoon at a private hospital. Dua was admitted to the hospital three weeks back. His cremation will take place at the Lodhi Road crematorium on Thursday. A recipient of the Padma Bhushan award, he was also conferred with D.Litt (Hon) by Punjab University and the Kurukshetra University. Dua was also a member of the Rajya Sabha. He served as editor of The Hindustan Times, editor-in-chief of The Indian Express and The Tribun and editorial advisor for The Times of India.—*PTI*

104-yr-old man's name 'under abjudication' in WB voter roll

Is it a crime to live long, says man who voted since India's 1st poll

KOLKATA, 4 MARCH

A 104-year-old man has complained of being listed in the 'under adjudication' category in the final electoral rolls issued by the Election Commission following the SIR exercise in West Bengal.

Sheikh Ibrahim, a resident of Jamalpur gram panchayat in Purba Bardhaman district, said he has voted in every election since India's first general polls after Independence and had never faced such an experience.

"Is it a crime to live beyond 100 years? I have always believed in casting votes and exercising my democratic rights. Why can't I vote this time? This is my country," he said.

His 70-year-old son said that after his father was called for a hearing at camps "due to some logical discrepancies as claimed by the EC," EC officials later visited their residence, and all necessary documents were submitted.

"The EC official who conducted the hearing expressed satisfaction and assured his name will be in the rolls. However, after the final rolls were published, we found his name listed 'under adjudication category.' We fail to comprehend why," his son said.

His son said that his aged father has been very disturbed by the incident.

The TMC alleged on X that "104-year-old Sheikh Ibrahim, who was born in pre-Independent India and has voted in every election since the first general elections, was summoned for a hearing and subjected to harassment after being included in the 'under adjudication' list."

"Can you imagine the extent of harassment he has faced? How much lower will the Commission stoop?" the party asked.

"Do they think they can gift Bengal to the BJP by deleting names of valid voters even before the elections? It is not that easy. Bengal knows how to respond, and it knows how to fight," the post read.

There was no immediate response from the EC or the BJP to the allegations. —*PTI*

Voters check their names in the voters list in Kolkata after the Election Commission published post-SIR electoral rolls of West Bengal –*REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE*

- His 70-year-old son said that after his father was called for a hearing at camps "due to some logical discrepancies as claimed by the EC," EC officials later visited their residence, and all necessary documents were submitted. His father was disturbed by it.

ALONG LOC

Army foils terrorists' infiltration bid in Jammu and Kashmir

RAJOURI/JAMMU, 4 MARCH

Army troops on Wednesday scuttled an infiltration attempt by a group of terrorists along the Line of Control (LoC) in Rajouri district.

The suspected persons were observed trying to sneak into this side from the Turkandi forward area around 4.15am, prompting the army to open fire.

The army's Jammu-based White Knight Corps confirmed that an infiltration attempt by the terrorists from across the border had been foiled.

"Responding with decisive force and showcasing superior tactical execution, alert troops of White Knight Corps engaged swiftly, foiling the infiltration attempt and denying any breach of the LoC. The enemy's designs were effectively thwarted through coordinated ground action," it said in a post on X.

Officials said it was not immediately clear whether any terrorist was hit in the firing.

A massive search operation has been launched, with reinforcements inducted to clear the area of any terrorist presence.

"Own troops have been reoriented to ensure relentless domination of the area, supported by integrated ground and aerial surveillance. A robust operational posture and heightened alert remain in force across the sector," the army said, adding, "the wall stands vigilant – every infiltration bid will fail."

The Army and BSF men deployed along the LoC and international border in Jammu and Kashmir have been placed on maximum alert in view of apprehension of infiltration attempts by militants from across the border.

On 19-20 February, army troops had foiled an infiltration bid by terrorists in Sunderbani sector of Rajouri, leading to the seizure of some arms and ammunition. —*PTI*

'Cruelty in divorce can't be decided by WhatsApp chats'

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

Divorce cannot be granted on grounds of alleged cruelty based on WhatsApp chats without giving the spouse a chance to rebut, the Bombay High Court has said.

The court last week week quashed an order passed by the Nashik district family court allowing an application filed by a man seeking divorce from his wife on grounds of cruelty.

The woman moved the HC, challenging the family court order claiming that the same was passed ex-parte and without giving her an opportunity to put forth her arguments.

The family court in 2025 relied on a WhatsApp chat submitted by the man in which the woman demanded that they shift from Nashik to Pune to live separately, and also made derogatory comments against her mother-in-law and sister-in-law.

The family court noted that the wife had used pressure tactics, emotional blackmail and intemperate language in the WhatsApp chat and held that cruelty was meted against the husband and he was entitled to divorce.

The high court said the matter needs to be remanded to the family court so that the wife can be heard and can submit evidence.

While the family court decides the matter afresh, the estranged couple can explore the possibility of settlement through mediation. —*PTI*

COLOURS OF JOY

Clockwise from top: Devotees celebrate Holi at the Swaminarayan Mandir in Ahmedabad, Gujarat; People take part in festivities at the Ghusuri Shyam Temple in Howrah, West Bengal; A child, perched on her father's shoulders, revels in Holi celebrations in Chennai on Wednesday –*PTI*

Kerala pvt hospital nurses on strike for Rs 40,000 salary

T'PURAM, 4 MARCH

A section of nurses working in private hospitals in Kerala began a strike on Wednesday, demanding a minimum monthly salary of Rs 40,000 and implementation of various pending assurances without further delay. The strike was called by the United Nurses Association (UNA), which also organised a march to the secretariat here as part of the protest. According to the protesting nurses, their salary was last revised in 2018 and has since become inadequate in view of the rising cost of living. One of their major demands is to fix their basic pay at Rs 40,000, she said. "The sector is witnessing a brain-drain now. Majority of qualified and experienced nurses are going abroad in search of good salary and living conditions," one of protesting nurses said. —*PTI*

Woman found dead in UP hailed from Turkmenistan

MEERUT, 4 MARCH

Police have revealed that the woman found dead in Mawana last month was a citizen of Turkmenistan, after initially identifying her as 'Archita Arora' of Delhi based on an Aadhaar card.

The police were compelled to reassess their conclusion after two women from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan approached them on 25 February, disputing the earlier identification.

They claimed the deceased was **Najmudinova Muhabbat Sunatovna** from Turkmenistan, who had been living in India for nearly 15 years, and alleged her passport was taken by middlemen. The burn injuries on her face and body might have been inflicted to hide distinctive tattoos.

Superintendent of police (rural) Abhijeet Kumar confirmed that the deceased appeared to be a citizen of Turkmenistan, adding that the Ministry of External Affairs has been contacted for verification. The woman was found on 21 February, with her face disfigured by burns, and police suspect she was killed after a dispute over room rent with hotel operator Chanchal Kumar.

Four suspects were arrested, and police seized a car, blanket, and inflammable substance. The victim's mother identified her. —*PTI*

Second accused in 'ex-Muslim' YouTuber's attack dies in encounter

GAZIABAD, 4 MARCH

The second accused in the attack on **YouTuber Salim Ahmed alias Salim Wastik**, who was injured in a police encounter in Ghaziabad on 3 March, has succumbed to his injuries.

Additional director general (STF and law and order) Amitabh Yash had said that the accused, Gulfaam, carrying a reward of Rs 1 lakh, was injured in an encounter in the evening in the Indirapuram area and sent to the hospital.

He was declared dead by doctors during treatment.

Two illegal firearms and one two-wheeler stolen from Delhi have been recovered from Gulfaam's possession.

On 26 February, two persons attacked Salim Wastik with sharp-edged weapons at his office in the Loni area, leaving him seriously injured.

He is currently undergoing treatment at a hospital.

The first accused, Zeeshan, who also carried a reward of Rs 1 lakh, was killed in a separate encounter.

Salim Ahmed, 50, runs a YouTube channel under the name 'Salim Wastik' and describes himself as an 'ex-Muslim'.

An FIR was registered on a complaint lodged by his son, Usman, against seven individuals. —*PTI*

EX-TDB PREZ GETS BAIL IN SABARIMALA GOLD THEFT CASE

KOLLAM, 4 MARCH

A vigilance court here on Wednesday granted statutory bail to former TDB president A Padmakumar in the case related to alleged misappropriation of gold from the Dwarapalaka (guardian deity) idols of the Lord Ayyappa shrine in Sabarimala, sources said.

Padmakumar had already gotten statutory bail in the case related to the alleged misappropriation of the gold from the door frames of the sanctum sanctorum.

The former Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) president is the eighth accused in the matter to come out of jail on bail. He is a former CPI(M) MLA. —*PTI*

6 children die while bathing in Bihar

MOTIHARI, 4 MARCH

Six children, including five girls, drowned while taking bath in a large water-filled pit in Bihar's East Champaran district, police said on Wednesday. The incident occurred on Tuesday evening at Lohargava village under the jurisdiction of Kesariya police station. The deceased have been identified as Diksha Kumari, Sonakshi Kumari, Priya Kumari, Arayadhya Kumari, Choti Kumari and Prince Kumar (11). When one girl entered the pit to take a bath, she started drowning and the others jumped in to save her.—*PTI*

WORLD OBESITY DAY

India ranks 2nd globally for childhood obesity

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The World Obesity Federation (WOF), has warned that most countries, including India, are off the track to meet the 2030 global target to halt the rise in childhood obesity.

The target was set for 2025, which was extended to 2030 after most countries failed to achieve it.

Estimates by WOF suggest that by 2040, 20 million children in India will be living with obesity, and 56 million will be living with overweight and obesity.

At least 120 million school-age children across the globe are expected to have early signs of chronic disease such as hypertension and cardiovascular ailments due to overweight and obesity by 2040.

According to the World Obesity Atlas 2026 released by the WOF on World Obesity Day on Wednesday, 14.921 million children from the age of 5-9 years and more than 26.402 million children from the age of 10-19 in India were overweight or obese in 2025.

China leads with 62 million children with high BMI and 33 million with only obesity, followed by India (41 million high BMI; 14 million obesity) and the US (27 million high BMI; 13 million obesity).

In India, from 2025 to 2040, children aged 5-19 years suffering fromBMI-attributed hypertension will increase from 2.99 million to 4.21 million; hyperglycaemia from 1.39 million to 1.91 million; high triglycerides from 4.39 million to 6.07 million and metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease from 8.39 million to 11.88 million.

74 per cent of those aged 11-17 years fail to meet the physical activity levels and 35.5 per cent of children receive school meals. —*PTI*

Museum in UK returns ancient idol to Tamil Nadu

LONDON, 4 MARCH

The University of Oxford's Ashmolean Museum has returned a 16th century bronze idol to India for its journey back to a temple in Tamil Nadu.

The sacred icon of Saint Thirumankai Alvar was acquired by the museum in a Sotheby's auction in 1967 before being alerted to its origins at the temple of Shri Soundararaja Perumal in Thadikombu by an independent researcher in November 2019.

This led to the museum requesting the High Commission of India in London to formally confirm its provenance. It was formally handed over at India House on 3 March.

Believed to have been stolen from the temple and replaced with a modern replica, the bronze sculpture is now set for its return journey after experts from the museum travelled to India to establish its roots with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). "We had to prove proven...," said Vikram Doraiswami, Indian High Commissioner to the UK—*PTI*

Hormuz closure chokes supply chains & trade flow

Cargo ships are stuck in the Gulf or taking a much longer detour around the southern tip of Africa after Hormuz's closure —PTI

The Iran war has effectively halted oil tanker movement in the key Strait of Hormuz. But it's also disrupting the wider global supply chain beyond oil, affecting everything from pharmaceuticals from India, semiconductors from Asia and oil-derived products like fertilisers that come from the West Asia.

Cargo ships are stuck in the Gulf or making a much longer detour around the southern tip of Africa. Planes carrying air cargo out of the West Asia are grounded. And the longer the war drags on, the more likely it is that there will be shortages and price increases on a wide range of goods.

"This is really causing some major impacts within the global supply chain," said Patrick Penfield, professor of supply chain practice at Syracuse University. "As this conflict keeps progressing, you'll start to see some shortages, you'll see some major price increases."

STALLED AT SEA

Clarksons Research, which tracks shipping data, estimates that about 3,200 ships, or about 4 per cent of global ship tonnage, are idle inside the Persian Gulf, but that includes about 1,231 that likely only operate within the Gulf. About 500 ships, or 1 per cent of global tonnage, are currently "waiting" outside the Gulf in ports off the coast of the United Arab Emirates and Oman, according to the firm.

"The supply chain is kind of like a long train with many cars, and each car represents, let's say, a port in the world. Well, if one car gets derailed, it can very often have a domino effect on many other cars behind it or in front of it," he said. "So, although we only have a small number of ports affected by this military action, it can really have a big effect on the total supply chain."

Computer chips, pharmaceuticals and other goods face delays

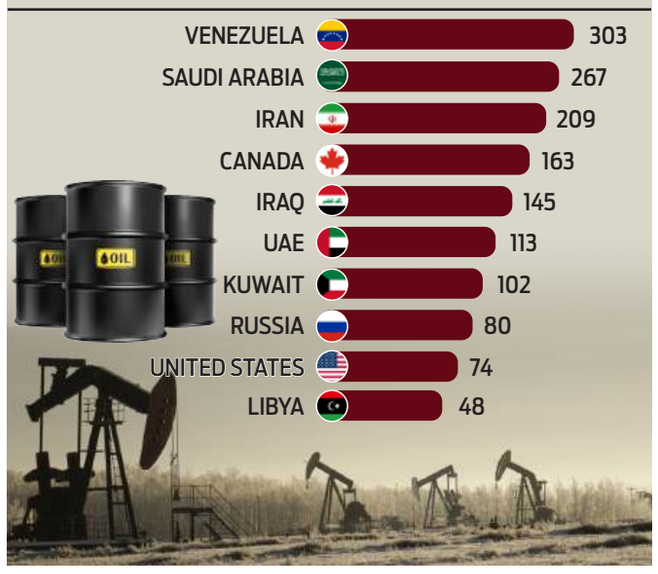
A wide range of products is shipped through the West Aisia East region. Along with about 20 per cent of the world's oil that comes from the region, products made with natural gas, such as petrochemical feedstock — used to make plastic and rubber — and nitrogen fertiliser come from the Middle East. Pharmaceuticals exported from India and semiconductors and batteries exported from Asia to the rest of the world are all shipped through the region and could face delays.

WHAT IS HORMUZ AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- The Strait of Hormuz is a 33km narrow waterway connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.
- It is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint.
- 20.8 million barrels per day of oil and products transits through Strait. 80 per cent of this goes to the Asian markets.
- About 20% of global LNG supply also passes through here.
- Closure of the strait affects Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and UAE as they are major exporters of oil.
- 40% to 50% of India's crude oil, 80–85% of LPG and 60% of LNG imports passes via this Strait.
- 3,200 ships are currently standard near the Strait right now.

COUNTRIES WITH THE LARGEST OIL RESERVES

OIL RESERVES IN 2025 (BILLION BARRELS)



LIMITED ROUTES, HIGHER COSTS

In addition to constraints on the Strait of Hormuz, the instability has put a damper on transit in the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, which had just begun to see more transit after years of instability due to Houthi attacks on ships in the region.

AIR CARGO UNDER PRESSURE

Air cargo has also been constrained. Closed airspace and airports in countries including the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, and Iran have stranded tens of thousands of people and cargo.

Each of the three major West Asian airlines — Emirates, Qatar Airways and Etihad Airways — operates fleets of cargo aircraft, and the airlines also transport goods in the belly of their passenger planes.

The amount of goods that travel through the air typically accounts for less than 1 per cent of all freight moving globally, but the products that do travel by air tend to be perishable or high-value goods like pharmaceuticals, electronics and produce that together account for about 35 per cent of the world trade value, Boeing estimated in its World Air Cargo Forecast.

The longer these airports in the Middle East remain closed, the greater the potential disruption to the economy if these sensitive shipments don't arrive or have to be rerouted around the conflict.

Flights through these Middle Eastern airport hubs are a key route for passengers and cargo from India. Henry Harteveldt, an airline industry analyst with Atmosphere Research Group, said it's going to be hard to get to India now.

Air cargo costs are expected to rise due to reduced capacity, increased demand, and surcharges. Maersk said in an operational update on Tuesday that it expects air freight rates to rise due to capacity constraints.

AN INDUSTRY THAT RUNS ON DISRUPTION

Despite the supply chain upheaval, however, Michael Goldman, general manager of North America of CARU Containers, said the industry will adjust. Over the past few years, it has faced other major disruptions like COVID supply shortages and other recent Mideast conflicts and has become more nimble.

"The specific situation that's happening is pretty unprecedented, so it's very unique from that perspective," he said. "(But) for the last few years the industry just kind of runs on disruption. So in terms of our industry having disruption, that is nothing new. That's more of the same."

LNG SUPPLY IN INDIA HIT

Qatar has halted liquefied natural gas (LNG) production after its facilities were attacked amid the ongoing West Asia conflict, disrupting supplies to India and triggering a severe crisis in the city gas sector. With LNG flows from Qatar fully suspended, City Gas Distribution companies and industrial users face supply cuts of up to 40 per cent. Petronet LNG has declared force majeure to major offtakers, including GAIL, IOC and BPCL. Its Dahej terminal reportedly has just two days' supplies left as vessels reroute from the Strait. —PTI

SALAR ساہر

Rap king Balen Singh battles with Oli for PM throne

RSP prime ministerial candidate Balendra Shah 'Balen' during a campaign ahead of Nepal's election in Bhaktapur —ANI

From underground rap battles to Kathmandu's city hall and now the national stage, Balen Shah's meteoric rise is reshaping Nepal's political landscape and challenging the dominance of its long-entrenched party heavyweights.

In 2022, Shah delivered one of the biggest political upsets in Nepal's recent history. Running as an Independent candidate, the structural engineer-turned-rapper defeated nominees from the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) (UML) to become Mayor of Kathmandu. Securing 61,767 votes, he outpaced seasoned party leaders and signalled a generational shift in voter sentiment.

At the time, his victory was widely viewed as a rebellion against traditional politics. Armed with a civil engineering degree, a background in Nepal's rap scene — including prominence in Raw Barz battles — and a formidable social media following, Shah ran a campaign driven more by digital engagement than party machinery. His blunt, anti-establishment rhetoric and promise to "clean up the capital" resonated strongly with young and urban voters.

As mayor, Shah adopted an assertive style. He launched high-profile drives against illegal encroachments, pushed for the digitisation of municipal services and intensified waste management reforms. Supporters praised his decisiveness; critics accused him of being confrontational and bypassing institutional processes. Rights groups also criticised his use of police against street vendors in efforts to clear roads and clamp down on unlicensed businesses, describing the approach as heavy-handed.

Now 35, Shah has stepped onto the national stage. After formally joining the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), which came fourth in the 2022 general election, he has positioned himself as a direct challenger to former prime minister KP Sharma Oli. In a bold move, Shah resigned as Kathmandu mayor to contest Jhapa-5, a constituency long regarded as Oli's stronghold, and announced his ambition to run for prime minister.

The race in Jhapa-5, centred on the town of Damak, has become a symbolic battleground between Nepal's entrenched political establishment and a new generation of politicians. For decades, the country has seen a revolving door of fragile coalition governments dominated largely by three major parties, including the UML and Nepali Congress.

Oli, a four-time prime minister, has won in Jhapa-5 six times and retains strong loyalty, particularly in rural areas. But the political mood has shifted since deadly anti-corruption protests last September forced his resignation. The unrest, initially sparked by a social media ban, escalated into days of demonstrations over corruption and the lack of opportunities for young people. Seventy-seven people were killed, many of them protesters shot by police.

This election will see more than 9,15,000 first-time voters, with nearly 19 million eligible voters overall. Around 46 per cent of Nepal's population is under 24, making youth concerns central to the campaign. Job creation has become a key plank of Shah's message, with youth unemployment standing at 20.6 per cent — among the highest rates in South Asia, according to the World Bank.

Shah is banking on anger at the former government and frustration over economic stagnation to build cross-generational support. His rise has been dramatic. Since announcing his candidacy in Jhapa-5, the so-called "Balen effect" has swept parts of the constituency. At a recent roadshow in Damak, crowds packed streets, balconies and rooftops. Supporters surged towards his campaign truck as he appeared through its roof window in his trademark black suit and sunglasses. Some wept when they failed to secure selfies.

Yet concerns linger. Shah has largely shunned mainstream media interviews, preferring to communicate through social media, where he commands millions of followers. On the campaign trail, his speeches rarely exceed three minutes, prompting accusations that he is avoiding difficult questions. His campaign did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

His social media history has also drawn scrutiny. Just months ago, shortly before midnight, he posted an expletive-laden message criticising the United States, India, China and Nepal's political parties. Although he later deleted the post, critics argue that his lack of clarity on foreign policy is troubling for a small, landlocked country navigating complex ties between two powerful neighbours, India and China.

Some voters and analysts worry that his impulsive tendencies could have geopolitical implications. Nepal's delicate balancing act between Indian and Chinese interests requires careful diplomacy, an area where Shah has offered few detailed proposals.

For many young Nepalis, this election is a test of whether the energy that fuelled last year's protests can be channelled into lasting political change or whether the country's traditional power brokers will once again reclaim their dominance. —PTI

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Khamenei son Mojtaba leads race to be Iran's Supreme Leader

Mojtaba Khamenei, a son of Iran's late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has long been regarded as a potential successor to the Islamic Republic's highest office — even though he has never held elected or appointed government office.

That speculation has intensified after an Israeli airstrike at the start of the war last week killed his 86-year-old father at his offices in Tehran. Also killed was Mojtaba's wife, Zahra Haddad Adel, who came from a family closely associated with Iran's theocratic establishment.

A secretive and rarely seen figure, Mojtaba has not appeared publicly since Saturday. He is believed to be alive and in hiding as American and Israeli airstrikes continue across Iran, though state-run media have offered no details about his whereabouts.

For years, his possible succession has drawn criticism from reformists and political rivals, who warned that elevating him could create a theocratic version of Iran's former hereditary monarchy. Yet with hardliners now hailing his father and wife as martyrs in a war against the United States and Israel, Mojtaba's standing may have strengthened among the ageing clerics of the 88-member Assembly of Experts, the body tasked with selecting the next supreme leader.

Whoever assumes the role will inherit control of a country at war, command of Iran's armed forces and oversight of a stockpile of highly enriched uranium that could be used to build a nuclear weapon, should such a decision be made.

Observers have often compared Mojtaba's position to that once held by Ahmad Khomeini, son of Iran's revolutionary founder Ruhollah Khomeini — a blend of aide-de-camp, confidant, gatekeeper and power broker. The US-based pressure group United Against Nuclear Iran described him as a key behind-the-scenes figure operating at the heart of power.

BORN INTO DISSENT

Born in 1969 in the holy city of Mashhad, a decade before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Mojtaba grew up as his father campaigned against Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. An official biography recounts how the shah's secret police, SAVAK, once raided the family home and beat the cleric. When Mojtaba and his siblings were told their father was going on holiday, Ali Khamenei later recalled correcting the account and telling them the truth.

After the revolution toppled the shah, the family moved to Tehran. Mojtaba went on to fight in the Iran–Iraq war as a member of the Habib ibn Mazahir Battalion, part of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard. Several members of the battalion later rose to influential intelligence posts within the Guard, reportedly with backing from the Khamenei network.

When Ali Khamenei became supreme leader in 1989, the family gained access to vast resources controlled by Iran's bonyads — powerful foundations built from state industries and assets once held by the shah. These organisations command billions of dollars in business holdings and operate largely beyond public scrutiny.

POWER RISING WITH HIS FATHER'S

Mojtaba's influence grew in tandem with his father's rule. Operating from offices in central Tehran, he cultivated ties across the clerical establishment and the Revolutionary Guard.

US diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks in the late 2000s referred to him as "the power behind the robes". One 2008 cable alleged he had tapped his father's phone, acted as his principal gatekeeper and built an independent power base. The cable described him as widely viewed within the regime as a capable and forceful leader who might one day assume at least a share of national leadership, despite questions over his theological credentials and relative youth at the time.

The same cable said he was regarded by some insiders as a plausible candidate for shared leadership upon his father's death, citing his skills, wealth and alliances. Mojtaba has worked closely with commanders of the Revolutionary Guard, including its expeditionary Quds Force and the Basij volunteer militia, which violently suppressed nationwide protests in January, according to the US Treasury. In 2019, during the first term of President Donald Trump, the United States sanctioned him for advancing what it described as his father's destabilising regional ambitions and oppressive domestic policies.

He has also faced allegations of political interference. Critics claim he supported the rise of hardline president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005 and backed his disputed re-election in 2009, which triggered the Green Movement protests. Reformist cleric and former presidential candidate Mahdi Karroubi publicly denounced him as "a master's son" and accused him of meddling in both votes. Ali Khamenei was reported at the time to have retorted that his son was "a master himself, not a master's son".

POWERS OF THE SUPREME LEADER AT STAKE

There has been only one previous transfer of power in the office of supreme leader. After the death of Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989 at the age of 86, Ali Khamenei assumed the role, guiding Iran through decades of confrontation with the West and consolidating the Guard's political and economic clout. The supreme leader sits at the apex of Iran's complex Shiite theocratic system, holding final authority over all major matters of state. He serves as commander-in-chief of the armed forces and the Revolutionary Guard, which the United States designated a terrorist organisation in 2019. The Guard leads Iran's self-styled "Axis of Resistance", a network of allied militant groups across the Middle East opposed to the US and Israel, and controls significant economic assets as well as the country's ballistic missile arsenal. —PTI

ISRAELI-US STRIKES KILLED 1,000 IN IRAN

Israel says next Supreme Leader will be a target as strikes continue across Lebanon, Tehran, Gulf & Israel

DUBAI, 4 MARCH

The death toll in Iran from the ongoing war with the US and Israel has reached at least 1,045 people, Iran said on Wednesday.

Iran's Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs offered the toll, saying it represented the number of bodies so far identified and prepared for burial. The actual toll could be significantly higher.

Eleven people in Israel have been killed since the conflict began.

Kuwait, which had previously reported a single death, said on Wednesday that an 11-year-old girl was killed by falling shrapnel as Kuwaiti forces were intercepting "hostile aerial targets." Three people were killed in the UAE and one in Bahrain.

DAMAGE TO US BASES

Satellite imagery appeared to show that US military bases in the region had suffered more significant damages than Washington had previously claimed. Images from Planet Labs and Vantor showed that the base in Manama, Bahrain, had suffered severe damage to several buildings, while communications infrastructure had been hit in several bases.

The ruins of a hotel in Beirut —*PTI*

Bases in Kuwait, the UAE and Saudi Arabia also appeared to have suffered damages, as US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth indicated that Washington can't stop all of Iran's attacks.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard said it was prepared for the "complete destruction of the region's (US) military and economic infrastructure".

Meanwhile, Israel's military ordered residents of dozens of border villages in southern Lebanon to evacuate as airstrikes on Beirut intensified.

Lebanon's state media reported Israeli artillery shelling on several Lebanese villages along the border.

Meanwhile, amid reports that Iran was close to appointing a new Supreme Leader, Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz said that any new leader to replace Ayatollah Ali Khamenei will be a "target for elimination".

"We will continue to act with full force, with our American partners, to dismantle the regime's capabilities and create the conditions for the Iranian people to overthrow it," Katz said. —*Agencies*

'IRAN HAS LAUNCHED 500 MISSILES, 2,000 DRONES AGAINST US'

>>CONTINUED FROM PG 1

US Navy Admiral Brad Cooper, head of US Central Command, said Iran has launched more than 500 ballistic missiles and 2,000 drones since the conflict began.

"We've already struck nearly 2,000 targets, with more than 2,000 munitions. We have severely degraded Iran's air defences and destroyed hundreds of ballistic missiles, launchers and drones," Cooper said in a prerecorded message released on Wednesday.

The Israeli military said it struck buildings in Tehran linked to the Basij, the volunteer force of Iran's Revolutionary Guard accused of leading a deadly crackdown on protesters in January.

Israeli spokesman Brig Gen Effie Defrin said a building in Qom was targeted on Tuesday where clerics were expected to discuss selecting a new Supreme Leader, though Iranian agencies Fars and Tasnim denied any meeting was under way.

Explosions rocked Tehran at dawn, with state television showing damaged buildings. Isfahan, Qom and other cities were also hit, including a missile production facility.

Defrin reported a decline in Iranian launches claiming that Tehran's capabilities were degraded.

Trump on Tuesday seemed to downplay the chances of the war ending Iran's theocratic rule, saying that "someone from within" the Iranian regime might be the best choice to take power once the US-Israel campaign is finished. He said that Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi might not be the best choice, though he's "nice". —*Agencies*

The Iran war is likely to produce a massive humanitarian crisis that could further destabilise Asia, Europe, and Africa. If the war drags on, as is likely, it could produce a wave of migrants from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. As is, lakhs of people are stranded in the Gulf amid the massive airspace closure. Here's a list of people stranded in the Gulf:

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-5

When the rich wage war, it's the poor who suffer....

Germans: 30,000+

Indians: 10,000,000+

British: 3,00,000+

US: 500,000+ (US yet to announce evacuation plan)

French: 4,00,000+

However, these people are likely to be evacuated by their government as airspaces open.

DRIVEN AWAY FROM HOME

- 30,000 people have been displaced in Lebanon after Israel escalated hostilities with Hezbollah, according to the UNHCR. 11,000 people have crossed over to Syria.
- Iran currently hosts 1.65 million refugees, including Iraqi Kurds and people from Afghanistan and Syria.
- A displacement of just 10% of Iran's population of 90 million "would rival the largest refugee flows of recent decades", said the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA).
- The UNHCR requires $454.2 million in 2026 to protect and assist forcibly displaced people in Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Central Asia, but Trump has slashed the UN's funding.

'No sign that Iran was building nuke bomb'

Rafael Grossi, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Association, said that there was no evidence that Iran was building a nuclear bomb, a direct rebuttal to US and Israel's justification for bombing Tehran. "However, its large stockpile of near-weapons grade enriched uranium and refusal to grant my inspectors full access are cause for serious concern," Grossi said.

'It boils down to Balfour Declaration'

Palestine Ambassador Abdullah Abu Shawesh said the war can't be discussed without highlighting the Balfour Declaration, which was when the British government publicly supported the creation of Israel. "We cannot isolate it from its root," he said.

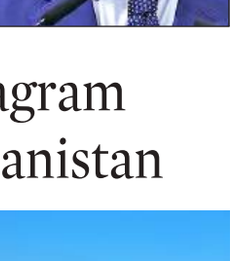
4 of 6 slain US soldiers named

The Pentagon has identified four of the six American soldiers killed so far. They are Capt Cody A Khork, 35; Sgt 1st Class Noah L Tietjens, 42; Sgt 1st Class Nicole M Amor, 39; and Spc Declan J. The six soldiers were killed in Kuwait, raising concerns about preparedeness.

LAWLESS HEGEMONS

Geo-strategically, hegemons are increasingly acting without constraint or respect for international norms or laws, while others bear the consequences. Now the extremes of this disruption are being played out in real time in the Middle East... Iran's nuclear threat remains, and now the US and Israel have acted without engaging the UN or consulting with allies including Canada

-Mark Carney, Canadian Prime Minister



France sends nuke-powered carrier to Mediterranean

PARIS, 4 MARCH

French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday ordered France's nuclear-powered aircraft carrier to move from the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean to help protect allied assets.

Macron said the Charles de Gaulle will be escorted by its air wing and its escorting frigates.

Macron added that Rafale fighter jets, air-defence systems, and airborne radar systems have been deployed over the past few hours in the Middle East.

Macron justified the actions by noting that Iranian drones struck a British air force base in Cyprus. Cyprus currently heads the EU.

The ship was set to arrive off the coast of Cyprus later in the day.

Meanwhile, the UK will deploy a Royal Navy warship to the eastern Mediterranean to bolster security around RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said HMS Dragon - a Type 45 Destroyer – was being sent along with missiles and helicopters.

Starmer's decision comes amid criticism from the US for not participating in the strikes against Iran. —*Agencies*

US will protect ships in Gulf and insure them: Trump

WASHINGTON, 4 MARCH

President Donald Trump said that the US Navy could begin escorting tankers through the strategically critical Strait of Hormuz "if necessary".

"The US will ensure the free flow of energy to the world," he said on Truth Social on Tuesday.

He added that the US would take "immediate steps to safeguard maritime trade" in the Gulf region, including offering political risk insurance through the Strait of Hormuz, a critical route for maritime oil trade.

This comes as maritime risk insurers have been cancelling their coverage for vessels in the Gulf. War risk premiums have risen as high as 1 percent of the value of a ship since Monday. This means that for a tanker worth $100m, the war risk premium for a single voyage would jump from roughly $200,000 to about $1 million.

The US Development Finance Corporation (DFC) will now provide political risk insurance and guarantees at "a very reasonable price", Trump said.

Iran said that any vessels in the Strait risks damage from missiles. —*Agencies*

Spain PM defies Trump, says 'no to the war'

MADRID, 4 MARCH

Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez slammed the US and Israel's military actions in Iran, standing firm on Wednesday against fresh trade threats from US President Donald Trump.

Trump on Tuesday threatened to end US trade with Spain because Madrid refused to allow the US to use joint military bases in the country to attack Iran.

"We are not going to be complicit in something that is bad for the world and is also contrary to our values and interests, just out of fear of reprisals from someone," Sanchez said in a televised address.

"In short, the position of the government of Spain can be summarised in four words," Sanchez said. "No to the war."

He added that: "The Iraq War generated a drastic increase in jihadist terrorism, a serious migration crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean and a generalised increase in energy prices.... It unleashed the greatest wave of insecurity that our continent has suffered since the fall of the Berlin Wall".

Despite Spain's refusal, Trump had earlier said that "we could use their base if we want". —*PTI*

China meets to discuss 5-year plan

BEIJING, 4 MARCH

China's ceremonial legislature is set to convene Thursday, unveiling the nation's policy direction and economic goals for the coming years. The gathering, known as the Two Sessions, includes the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, where the Communist Party will ratify new laws. The NPC, with nearly 3,000 members, votes almost unanimously, while the advisory body comprises elites from society, including minority representatives, but holds little policy power.

The NPC will announce GDP and economic targets, with attention on the 15th five-year plan, focused on technological self-sufficiency.

Experts predict China may lower its growth target to a record low. —*PTI*

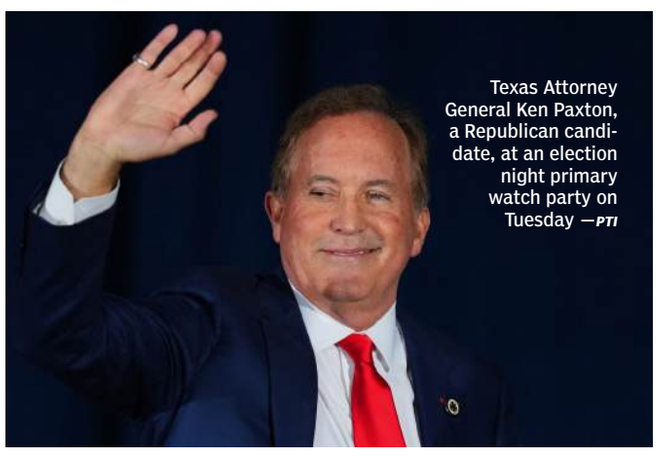
CONFUSION SNARLS POLLS

3 US states vote in primaries ahead of midterms

WASHINGTON, 4 MAR

Polls were beginning to close Tuesday in primary elections in three states, in a vote that marks the official beginning of the midterm elections. Voters cast ballots in North Carolina, Arkansas and Texas, where confusion in two counties enraged some voters who were turned away, and a judge in Dallas County extended voting by two hours.

As war with Iran breaks out, Democrats and Republicans are figuring out who they want to lead their party into November's general election, when control of Congress and statehouses around the country will be up for grabs. The results of Tuesday's elections could offer a hint of voter sentiment.



Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, a Republican candidate, at an election night primary watch party on Tuesday —*PTI*

The most hotly contested races of the day were in Texas, with fierce competition on both sides of the aisle for US Senate nominations. It's possible that the Republican campaign will continue into a runoff. Republican party senator Tom Cotton has cinched nomination for a third term in Arkansas.

Earlier, a judge in Dallas ordered that Democratic polling locations remain open for two extra hours because of confusion caused by the county Republican Party refusing to hold a joint primary with Democrats, which forced voters to go to local precincts to cast ballots rather than countywide facilities they usually use.

The Democratic congresswoman and US Senate candidate from Dallas blamed local Republicans, as well as Republicans in the Austin area, for the confusion of voters who were being turned away from polling locations in Tuesday's primaries.

Similar chaos extended into Williamson County north of Austin. Democrats there, like in Dallas, asked a judge to extend voting. —*PTI*

Pak targets Bagram Airbase in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, 4 MARCH

Pakistan launched a significant operation targeting Bagram Airbase in Afghanistan, claiming it was a response to Afghan Taliban attacks along the border. State-run PTV reported that Pakistan conducted a "major attack on Bagram Air Base" as part of Operation Ghazab lil Haq, following Taliban assaults on 53 locations over 2,600km of border. The channel said the attack destroyed an aircraft hangar and two warehouses, citing satellite images and The New York Times.

Afghanistan's Ministry of Defence confirmed the airstrike, with Pakistan reportedly carrying out over 50 strikes in the past week.

An unnamed defence expert claimed the operation caused heavy damage to the Taliban regime, sending a clear message that Pakistan can operate anywhere in Afghanistan.

Separately, Pakistani security forces killed TTA commander Qahraman near Torkham border during an operation aimed at militants.

Meanwhile, the US has announced the withdrawal of non-emergency staff from its consulates in Karachi and Lahore after protests over the killing Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. —*PTI*

—ANI

GX Group partners with Qualcomm for Wi-Fi 7 in India

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Broadband equipment manufacturer GX Group has partnered with US chip firm Qualcomm to launch AI-enabled Wi-Fi 7 solutions made in India. GX is one of the beneficiaries of the telecom production-linked incentive scheme. The company's Wi-Fi 7 broadband platform was launched by Union Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia at Mobile World Congress 2026 in Barcelona. GX Group Director Sambit Swain said India's opening of the lower 6 GHz band enhances its position as a global broadband innovation hub, strengthening domestic connectivity and supply chains. The Wi-Fi 7 portfolio features advanced wireless tech like wide channels, multi-link operation, and spectrum efficiency, supporting applications such as 8K streaming, cloud gaming, AR/VR, and IoT deployments. Qualcomm India's Manmeet Singh added that the collaboration aims to deliver scalable, high-performance wireless solutions for homes and enterprises. —*PTI*

PNGS Reva Diamond falls 4% in debut trade

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Shares of PNGS Reva Diamond Jewellery Ltd listed on Wednesday at nearly a 4 per cent discount to the issue price of Rs 386. The stock debuted at Rs 372 on the BSE, down 3.62 per cent, and at Rs 375 on the NSE, a 2.84 per cent discount. Its market valuation stood at Rs 1,183.94 crore. The listing came amid a broader market slump as tensions in West Asia weighed on equities, with the Sensex and Nifty lower. The Rs 380 crore IPO, priced at Rs 367–386 per share, was subscribed 1.23 times. Proceeds will fund 15 new stores by FY2028, brand promotion and corporate purposes. —*PTI*

MRF to invest Rs 5,300 cr in new TN factory

CHENNAI, 4 MARCH

Tyre giant MRF Ltd has signed an MoU with the Tamil Nadu government to invest Rs 5,300 crore over 12 years in a new tyre manufacturing plant in the state. The factory will be established at the SIPCOT Industrial Park in Sivaganga district, creating around 1,000 jobs, according to the government.

At an event held at the Secretariat, MRF Ltd Chairman and Managing Director K M Mammen, Vice Chairman Arun Mammen, and Guidance MD and CEO Darez Ahmed exchanged documents in the presence of Chief Minister MK Stalin, Chief Secretary N Muruganandham, and Minister for Industries TRB Raja.

In a separate BSE filing, MRF stated that the MoU with Tamil Nadu's nodal agency Guidance is non-binding, subject to approval of a customised incentive package, infrastructure support, land, and statutory clearances. The project aims to establish a greenfield facility for automotive tyres and related products.

The company noted that the Rs 5,300 crore investment will be spread over 12 years and is expected to generate direct employment for about 1,000 individuals. MRF currently operates approximately 10 manufacturing units across India, producing a range of tyres including passenger car radials, truck and bus radials, off-road, and two-wheeler tyres. —*PTI*

Iran war delays supply chain; exports hit in M'rashtra

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 4 MARCH

The joint US-Israeli war on Iran has begun to negatively impact on the global supply chain via industrial units in Maharashtra. Industrial hubs like Waluj, Chikalthana, and Shendra, home to major automobile, pharmaceutical, and steel manufacturers, are facing export disruptions due to the conflict in West Asia.

The Marathwada Exporters' Forum (CMIA) reports that the conflict is disrupting supply chains for about 1,000 export units in Chhatrapati Sambha jinagar. Forum Head Rohit Jaju noted that several Europe-bound automobile parts are stranded at the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority.

Agricultural exports to West Asia have stalled, while the automotive sector faces rising costs and 20–22 day shipping delays if forced to use longer alternative routes, Jaju said.

Companies needing our products may not wait and could seek new vendors. With European imports disrupted, we may have to buy fruits like apples and kiwis at higher prices, Jaju said.

Shipping companies have halted operations due to the war, prompting some members to return their materials. If surcharges are imposed later, post-war exports could become more expensive, he said. —*PTI*

Iran war wipes out Rs 16.32L cr from markets in 2 days

BSE Sensex tumbles by 1,123 points, likewise Nifty crashes 1.55 per cent

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Equity investors lost Rs 16.32 lakh crore in two days as stock markets reeled from the escalating conflict involving the US, Israel and Iran, with surging crude prices and global uncertainty battering stock sentiment.

The 30-share BSE Sensex on Wednesday tumbled 1,122.66 points, or 1.40 per cent, to close at 79,116.19. Intra-day, it slumped 1,795.65 points (2.23 per cent) to 78,443.20. Since Friday, the benchmark has shed 2,171 points, or 2.67 per cent. Markets were shut on Tuesday for Holi.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms eroded by Rs 16,32,428.12 crore to Rs 4,47,18,243.15 crore (USD 4.85 trillion) over the period.

"Investor sentiment remained fragile amid weak global cues, elevated crude oil prices and persistent geopolitical uncertainty," said Ajit Mishra, SVP Research, Religare Broking, pointing to foreign institutional selling along with currency volatility.

Brent crude jumped as much as 3.08 per cent to USD 83.91 a barrel during the session, though it later eased to USD 81.03. US benchmark crude slipped to USD 73.94. Oil prices are up about 11 per cent since US and Israeli strikes on Iran began five days ago. Insurance costs and a "war premium" could add USD 5–15 per barrel, analysts said.

Investor sentiment remains fragile amid weak global cues, elevated crude oil prices and persistent geopolitical uncertainty —*PTI*

WORLD MARKETS

DOW US	48,640.24	(0.82%)
S&P 500 US	6,816	(0.94%)
Nasdaq US	22,516.69	(1.02%)
Nikkei JAPAN	54,245.54	(3.61%)
Hang Seng CHN	25,249.48	(2.01%)
KOSPI S.KOREA	5,093.54	(12.06%)
DAX GERMANY	24,210.24	(1.76%)
FTSE 100 UK	10,555.59	(0.68%)
CAC 40 PARIS	8,204.48	(1.24%)

Metal stocks led losses, with Tata Steel plunging 6.76 per cent. Bajaj Finance, UltraTech Cement, NTPC, InterGlobe Aviation, Bajaj Finserv and Hindustan Unilever also declined. Bharti Airtel, Infosys and Tech Mahindra bucked the trend.

Oil marketing companies dropped for a second day, HPCL fell 5.41 per cent, BPCL 4.94 per cent and IOC 4.78 per cent, while paint makers also slipped. Broader markets were weak, with 3,245 stocks declining.

Analysts said heightened uncertainty could persist, although oil prices stabilised after US President Donald Trump indicated the US Navy may escort tankers through the Strait of Hormuz. —*PTI*

PETRONET LNG SHARES TANK 12%

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Shares of Petronet LNG Ltd plunged nearly 12 per cent on Wednesday after reports that Qatar, India's largest supplier of imported natural gas, declared force majeure on deliveries following a production halt triggered by an Iranian drone strike.

The stock fell 11.69 per cent to Rs 273 on the BSE and dropped 11.95 per cent to Rs 271.75 on the NSE.

Sources said the disruption has led to a cut in gas supplies to Indian industry by 10 to 40 per cent. Qatar accounts for around 40 per cent of the nearly 27 million tonnes of liquefied natural gas (LNG) that India imports annually for power generation, fertiliser production, CNG distribution and piped cooking gas.

Petronet has informed gas offtakers GAIL (India) Ltd and Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) about the halt. Gas marketers have reduced supplies to industries while maintaining flows for CNG retailing.

Petronet has a long-term contract to buy 8.5 million tonnes per annum of LNG from Qatar and also procures spot cargoes. Shares of Mahanagar Gas fell 8.50 per cent, Indraprastha Gas declined 5 per cent and Gujarat Gas slipped 4 per cent. —*PTI*

India's service sector growth in Feb eases amid inflation India's

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

India's services sector growth moderated slightly in February, with new order expansion slowing to a 13-month low amid softer demand and rising inflationary pressures, a monthly survey showed.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index eased to 58.1 in February from 58.5 in January. In PMI terms, a reading above 50 indicates expansion. Despite the moderation, the index signalled robust growth in the sector, which accounts for around 55 per cent of India's Gross Value Added.

Pranjul Bhandari, HSBC's Chief India Economist, said new order growth slowed due to heightened competition. Export performance remained strong, with gains reported from Canada, Germany, China, Singapore, the UAE, the UK and the US, marking the fastest rise in international sales since August.

Operating expenses rose at the sharpest pace in two-and-a-half years, driven by higher labour and food costs, prompting firms to increase service prices. Input and output price inflation accelerated, though business confidence climbed to a one-year high.

Overall activity rose at its quickest pace in three months-supported by strong manufacturing momentum and faster job creation. The survey covered around 400 services firms. —*PTI*

Rupee slumps to all-time low of 92.16 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

The rupee slumped 67 paise to close at a record low of 92.16 against the US dollar on Wednesday, pressured by surging crude oil prices amid the Iran crisis.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 92.05 and fell to an intraday low of 92.35 before ending provisionally at 92.16, marking a sharp decline from its previous close. On Monday, the currency had already dropped 41 paise to settle at 91.49. The forex market was shut on Tuesday for Holi.

Traders said a global risk-off mood triggered by escalating tensions in West Asia weighed heavily on emerging market currencies. The dollar index crossed the 98 level during the session, further pressuring the rupee. Massive selling in domestic equities and continued foreign fund outflows added to the weakness.

Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director at Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, said the sharp escalation in the West Asia conflict and the resulting spike in oil prices had dented investor sentiment. Higher crude prices raise inflation concerns and increase fiscal pressure on India, a major oil importer, leading to bond selling and rising yields, he said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which measures the greenback against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.23 per cent lower at 98.82 later in the session. —*PTI*

- At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 92.05 but then fell to an intra-day low of 92.35 before finally ending provisionally at 92.16, marking a sharp decline from its previous close.

Silver at ₹3 lakh/kg, gold at ₹1.73 lakh/10g

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Precious metal prices soared up to 12 per cent in India on Monday, amid West Asia tensions. Silver surged to Rs 2.95 lakh per kilogram, up Rs 32,000 (11.94 per cent) from Friday's Rs 2,68,000. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity increased Rs 8,100 (4.92 per cent) to Rs 1,72,800 per 10 grams, from Rs 1,64,700 previously.

Gaurav Garg, Research Analyst said,"Gold and silver prices witnessed a sharp surge as rising geopolitical tensions in West Asia triggered aggressive safe-haven buying. The escalation followed US and Israel military strikes on Iran, rattling global markets and prompting a swift shift towards bullion." Globally, spot gold gained USD 116.38 (2.21 per cent) to USD 5,394.28 per ounce, reaching its highest in two months.

Silver was 1.43 per cent higher at USD 95.19 per ounce. Saumil Gandhi of HDFC noted, "The escalation has raised concerns about regional stability, energy infrastructure, and global trade routes."

Iran launched retaliatory strikes across several neighbouring countries, heightening fears of regional disruption. Upcoming US economic data could increase market volatility. —*PTI*

L&T shares fall 4%, hit 5-week low

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

L&T fell sharply on 4 March, sliding 4.54 per cent, or Rs 184.70, to Rs 3,882. Earlier in the day, it plunged more than 7 per cent to a five-week low amid tensions in West Asia.

By 10:25am, shares were trading 7 per cent lower at Rs 3,760 apiece, making it the top loser on the Nifty. The construction and engineering major has declined about 12.5 per cent in four sessions.

Investors are wary of L&T's exposure to West Asia, which accounts for 37 per cent of its orders and a large share of its workforce. Instability could disrupt projects and prompt traders to cut positions.

International orders made up 55 per cent of total inflows. In the December quarter, they totalled Rs 66,848 crore (49 per cent of inflows), while international revenue was Rs 38,775 crore (54 per cent of total). About 55 per cent of Gulf orders are fixed-price contracts, heightening cost and payment risks. —*Agencies*

Walmart's PhonePe plans $10B IPO

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

Walmart-backed fintech firm PhonePe is planning to list at a valuation of USD 9 to USD 10.5 billion. According to Reuters, the proposed IPO is expected to raise between USD 900 million and USD 1.05 billion.

At the upper end, the valuation is lower than the USD 12 billion at which the Bengaluru-based firm last raised USD 100 millionnin 2023.

PhonePe filed papers in September, aiming to complete the by April, with shares to be traded on BSE and NSE.

Walmart is set to pare its stake by about 12 per cent through the offer, while Tiger Global and Microsoft will exit fully. The three investors plan to sell around 50.7 million shares, with no fresh issue by the company.

PhonePe's listing would be India's second-largest fintech IPO after Paytm's roughly USD 20 billion debut in 2021. Paytm's current capitalisation stands at about USD 7.1 billion. For the six months to 30 September, PhonePe's losses widened to 14.44 billion rupees from 12.03 billion rupees a year earlier, even as revenue rose 22 per cent to 39.18 billion rupees. In India's wider retail and e-commerce battle, Walmart-backed Flipkart remains a dominant player, while Reliance's JioMart is expanding aggressively with a tech-driven footprint, intensifying competition between Walmart and Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries.

THE BREAKDOWN

Top Walmart shareholders are...	
Vanguard Group	(435.65M shares)
BlackRock	(345.66M)
JPMorgan Chase	(233.19M)
Doug McMillon - CEO	(2.26 M)
Greg Penner - CEO	(1.70M)
Suresh Kumar - CTO	(1.32M)

- Walmart owner, Walton family, is the richest in the world with net worth of $513.4 billion.
- Walmart has 10,750 stores worldwide.
- Walmart bought a majority stake (80%) in Flipkart, in a $16 billion deal in 2018. —*PTI*

AMID BACKLASH

OpenAI CEO admits defence deal 'looked opportunistic'

WASHINGTON, 4 MARCH

OpenAI Chief Executive Sam Altman defended the company's controversial decision to allow its ChatGPT artificial intelligence to be used for classified assignments by the US Department of Defence.

Altman told staff this week that OpenAI stands by the deal despite criticism, but conceded that announcing it so quickly made the firm look "opportunistic" and "not united with the field."

The contract, struck shortly after rival firm Anthropic refused Pentagon terms on ethical grounds, allows ChatGPT to be deployed on classified US defence networks. Altman stressed that OpenAI does not control how the Department uses the technology.

In response to concerns about potential misuse, Altman said amendments to the agreement now explicitly bar the use of OpenAI's AI for mass domestic surveillance and affirm that it will not be used by defence intelligence agencies such as the NSA without further contract changes.

The original announcement came just hours after the Pentagon designated Anthropic a "supply chain risk" for refusing to relax safeguards against autonomous weapons and surveillance.

However, the Pentagon is also said to have talked with Elon Musk's xAI to allow for using its models across classified use cases.

OpenAI set three conditions for the use of its AI by the Pentagon: no mass domestic surveillance, autonomous weapons systems or high-stakes automated decisions.

Altman reportedly said that xAI will, however, pose no such requests to the Pentagon and will do whatever the agency says. —*Agencies*

2.5M users boycott ChatGPT

A website tracking the boycott on ChatGPT reports that more than 2.5 million users have quit the platform after OpenAI signed a contract allowing the US Department of Defence to deploy its AI on a classified network. ChatGPT's global user base exceeds 900 million. The boycott figures are based on website pledges, social media shares and app usage data. Organisers said they are mobilising Americans as well as users worldwide to send a clear message to technology firms. Users on Reddit and X claimed they are switching to Claude.

Meta trial: Zuckerberg, Mosseri depositions revealed

SANTA FE, 4 MARCH

Prosecutors in New Mexico on Tuesday played unseen video depositions of Meta executives in a trial accusing the social media giant of failing to disclose knowledge of harm to children on its platforms.

The state's case centres on depositions from Meta chief executive **Mark Zuckerberg** and Instagram head Adam Mosseri. Prosecutors allege the company, which owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, violated consumer protection laws by not disclosing risks such as social media addiction and child sexual exploitation.

Jurors watched footage of prosecutors questioning Mosseri about safety, profits and features that may contribute to sleep deprivation, unwanted contact with adults and negative effects of beauty filters. Asked whether Instagram should do everything possible to protect teenagers, Mosseri said the platform should "do what we can", noting some harmful content will still appear.

He insisted Meta prioritises safety over profits, but prosecutors contrasted that with internal audits and discussions about features aimed at curbing compulsive use that were not always implemented.

The case, alongside a parallel trial in Los Angeles, could influence thousands of similar lawsuits nationwide. Zuckerberg has apologised in Congress to affected families but has not accepted direct responsibility. —*PTI*

India and England: Familiar foes seek another SF showdown

Abhishek is in desperate need of a confidence-boosting innings

MUMBAI, 4 MARCH

India's captain Suryakumar Yadav, second right, with teammates during a training session ahead of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 semi-final -PTI

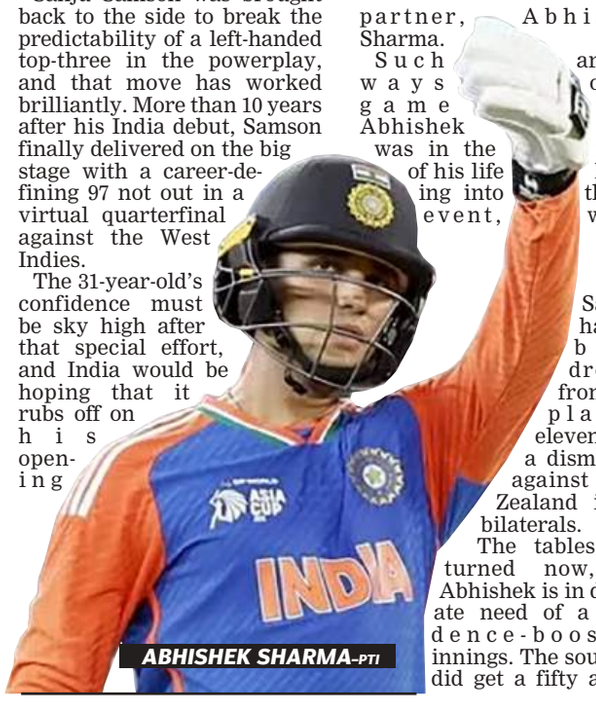
Having not exactly sailed into the T20 World Cup semi-finals, India must now negotiate a potent spin threat from a dangerous England side as both teams chase perfection in Thursday's high-pressure knockout game at the Wankhede Stadium.

Overwhelming favourites at the start of the tournament, India have not been able to stitch together a perfect game against stronger sides in the competition.

However, they have served themselves well by adopting a flexible approach after being pasted at the hands of South Africa in their Super 8 opener.

Sanju Samson was brought back to the side to break the predictability of a left-handed top-three in the powerplay, and that move has worked brilliantly. More than 10 years after his India debut, Samson finally delivered on the big stage with a career-defining 97 not out in a virtual quarterfinal against the West Indies.

The 31-year-old's confidence must be sky high after that special effort, and India would be hoping that it rubs off on his opening partner, Abhishek Sharma.


ABHISHEK SHARMA-PTI

Such are the ways of the game that Abhishek was in the form of his life leading into the ICC event, while Samson had to be dropped from the playing eleven after a dismal run against New Zealand in the bilaterals.

The tables have turned now, and Abhishek is in desperate need of a confidence-boosting innings. The southpaw did get a fifty against Zimbabwe in the Super 8 but remains far from his ballistic best. England will have their plans ready for the two openers. Expect a barrage of short balls into the body from Jofra Archer to test Samson, who has struggled against the England tearaway in the past, while Will Jacks could trouble Sharma with his off-spin in the powerplay.

The match starts at 7 pm IST

T20 WC records highest ever viewership: Jay Shah

ICC chairman Jay Shah on Wednesday said that the ongoing T20 World Cup has broken all broadcasting records as the viewership surpassed 500 million, the highest ever in the history of the tournament.

The tournament was deemed the most global and accessible, with significant viewership growth driven by high-stakes matches and digital consumption, goals the ICC set out to achieve before the start of the tournament.

An elated Shah posted on his 'X' handle, "The journey of the @ICC #T20WorldCup 2026 began with the ambition to make it the most #global & #accessible Cricket event ever. I am humbled that viewership for the event in India has crossed 500 million, the highest ever for any T20 World Cup in history. "It was also heartening to see concurrent viewers @JioHotstar hit a peak of 60.5 million. With Knock-out matches for the tournament starting tonight, we hope that the immeasurable love our events receive from Indian fans helps break more records."

The two semifinals and the final of the tournament are yet to be played, but it has already crossed the figures recorded in the last edition of the event in the Americas in 2024. —*PTI*

Brook promises fearless England in Mumbai shootout

On the eve of a T20 World Cup semifinal that feels as much theatre as sport, England captain Harry Brook did not indulge in hype. He acknowledged the scale of the upcoming big one: "It's a dream come true... to play in a World Cup semi-final against the home nation on a very iconic ground." But quickly pivoted to something more grounded: Freedom, bravery and discomfort. England is not coming to Mumbai to admire the occasion. They are coming, as Brook put it, "to go out there and just play with freedom, play brave, and take it to them as much as we can." The "them", of course, is India, tournament favourites, playing at home, backed by noise and numbers. But Brook's England has thrived on tightrope acts. England's route to the semifinal has not been flawless. In fact, Brook was candid: "We haven't quite played that perfect performance, and I feel like it's just around the corner," he said. What they have done, repeatedly, is win from positions of discomfort. "We've won them in tight games, which in World Cups proves to be very important," he said.

ODI SERIES IN BANGLADESH

PCB names six uncapped players

LAHORE, 4 MARCH

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Wednesday named six uncapped players in a 15-member squad that will take on Bangladesh in a three-match away ODI series, starting March 11.

After a few days of uncertainty surrounding the tour because of flight disruptions due to the Iran war, the PCB announced the squad.

The inclusion of six uncapped players indicates that the panic button has been pushed following the poor performance of the national team in the T20 World Cup, from where the side was eliminated at the Super 8s stage.

The uncapped players include Maaz Sadaqat, Shamyl Hussain, Ghazi Ghori, Saad Masood, and Abdul Samad, all of whom played against England Lions for Pakistan Shaheens in Abu Dhabi. The series was cancelled with three ODIs remaining because of the regional tensions.

The selectors have also recalled fast bowler Haris Rauf and batsman Hussain Talat in the squad that will be led by Shaheen Shah Afridi.

The team will depart for Dhaka on March 9 with all three ODIs scheduled at the Shere Bangla National Stadium.

Squad: Shaheen Shah Afridi (captain), Abdul Samad, Abrar Ahmed, Faheem Ashraf, Faisal Akram, Haris Rauf, Hussain Talat, Maaz Sadaqat, Mohammad Rizwan (wk), Mohammad Wasim Jnr, Muhammad Ghazi Ghori (wk), Saad Masood, Sahibzada Farhan, Salman Ali Agha and Shamyl Hussain. —*PTI*

SERIES SCHEDULE

- 8 March – Pakistan arrival
- 10 March – Practice
- 11 March – First ODI at Shere Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Dhaka
- 13 March – Second ODI at Shere Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Dhaka
- 15 March – Third ODI at Shere Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Dhaka

-PTI

More ACL matches in Middle East postponed

DUBAI, 4 MARCH

The U.S. and Israel's attack on Iran has affected countries throughout the Gulf, disrupting travel in some of the world's busiest transit hubs and forcing several sporting events to be cancelled. Western region clashes in the Asian Champions League Elite, Champions League Two, and the third-tier Challenge League, scheduled for next week between Monday and Wednesday, have been postponed, the AFC said in a statement. The AFC earlier postponed this week's Asian Champions League Elite round of 16 clashes in the Middle East, as Iran cancelled all sporting events and the Qatar Football Association suspended all matches in the country. The AFC's priority remains the safety and security of all stakeholders—*PTI*

-PTI

Japan off to winning start with 2-0 win over Taiwan

TAIWAN, 4 MARCH

Powerhouse Japan was frustrated for an hour by an obdurate Taiwan side but ultimately prevailed 2-0 at the start of its Women's Asian Cup Group C campaign in Perth on Wednesday. Midfielder Momoko Tanikawa latched onto a Hana Takahashi ball and finished coolly in the 61st minute to finally break the deadlock. A powerful header from substitute Kiko Seike added the second in stoppage time. The Nadeshiko, looking to reclaim the title they won back-to-back at the 2014 and 2018 Asian Cups, dominated possession but were denied more goals by a combination of resolute defending and Taiwan goalkeeper Wang Yu-ting.—*PTI*

Gukesh loses to Aravindh in 6th round

PRAGUE, 4 MARCH

Defending champion Aravindh Chithambaram found a textbook-style tactic to outwit compatriot D. Gukesh, relegating the reigning FIDE World champion to the last spot after the end of the sixth round of the Masters section of the Prague International Chess Festival.

The victory for Aravindh meant that Gukesh is now ranked number 20 on the live rating list, which did not feature Viswanathan Anand due to his possibly inactive status. There has been a clear struggle for Gukesh to maintain his status as the world champion since he won the title in December 2024.

Possibly the only exception was the Tata Steel Masters in January 2025, when he lost the tiebreaker to R. Praggnanandhaa after tying for first place. A recent slum has now seen the world champion losing over fifty points in rating.

For the record, Aravindh finally changed to a Sicilian defence as black after his Philidor experiment failed miserably. Going for the complications for Gukesh was easy, as he sacrificed a pawn to find some tactics in the early stages of the middle game.

Aravindh would have been happy with a draw, the way the position unfolded with white having a rook against two knights. But on the 40th move, with seconds remaining, Gukesh made the decisive error. It was all over eight moves later. Surprisingly, this was the only decisive game of the day, with the remaining four ending in draws.

Jorden van Foreest remained in sole lead on 4.5 points, drawing with local star David Navara, who remained joint second with Abdusattorov Nodirbek of Uzbekistan, a half point behind. David Anton Guijarro on 3.5 is closest to the three above him on 3.5 after settling for peace against Parham Maghsoodloo of Iran. —*PTI*

ALL ENGLAND OPEN 2026

Satwik-Chirag lose in Round of 32

BIRMINGHAM, 4 MARCH

Indian men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty on Wednesday lost their Round of 32 match against Malaysia's Aaron Tai and Khai Xing Kang at the All England Open 2026 in Birmingham.

The World No. 4 pair went down 23-21, 21-12 in 42 minutes and crashed out of the competition.

The Indians trailed through a major part of the opening game until saving two game points and levelling the score at 20-20. But the Malaysian pair took the decisive points to snatch the opener.

The second game was a one-sided affair with Rankireddy and Shetty trailing by seven points at one stage.

In mixed doubles, India's pairing of Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Gadde went down to France's Thom Gicquel and Delphine Delrue 21-9, 22-20 inside 36 minutes. —*PTI*

Sara Didar holds back tears on a war-related question

GOLD COAST, 4 MARCH

Sara Didar choked back tears as she shared the concerns of the Iranian soccer team for their families and loved ones at home amid the war while they're in Australia, contesting the Women's Asian Cup.

"Obviously, we're all concerned, and we're sad at what has happened to Iran and our families in Iran," Didar said in comments translated into English during a news conference on Wednesday on the eve of a Group A game against Australia. "I really hope for our country to have good news ahead. And I hope that my country will be strongly alive." The 21-year-old striker was part of the squad that stood in silence as the Iranian anthem played at the Gold Coast Stadium before their opening loss to South Korea on Monday.

On Wednesday, an Asian Football Confederation moderator asked reporters before the scheduled pre-match news conference to stick with football questions and refrain from asking about the war. When a question was posed, Didar and Jafari each expressed concerns about the people in Iran. "Obviously, we have so much concern regarding the health of our families and our loved ones and all other Iranian people inside our country —*PTI*

Gill and Gautam emerge as joint leaders after Round Two of Phillaur Open

PHILLAUR, 4 MARCH

Sukhraj Singh Gill and Rajesh Kumar Gautam held the joint lead with a total of five-under 137 after Round Two of the DP World PGTI Phillaur Open, here on Wednesday.

Gill (70-67) and Gautam (70-67), who were both overnight tied ninth, followed up their first-round scores of one-under 70 with scores of four-under 67 in round two, to move into the joint lead.

Aditya Raj Singh Chahal, Pankaj Maandiya, Shaurya Sharma and Md Muaj were all placed tied third at a total of four-under 138.

The cut went at three-over 145. The top 42 professionals made the cut for the third and final round.

Teenager Sukhraj Singh Gill, who hails from Canada, made an eagle, four birdies and two bogeys during round two, while Lucknow-based Gautam, a winner on the NexGen last year, made an eagle, three birdies and a bogey on Wednesday."My hitting was exceptional today.

I landed three shots within three feet of the pin that all produced birdies.

I also holed an eagle from the bunker on the 10th. However, the focus in the final round will be on my putting as I missed a lot of putts today, especially on the front nine. I don't want to repeat that come the last round," Gautam said,Phillaur-based professional Swatanter Kumar made the cut as he totalled three-over 145 after two rounds. —*PTI*

MEDVEDEV, AMONG PLAYERS IN DUBAI, TO LEAVE UAE

DUBAI, 4 MARCH

The "vast majority" of players who were stranded in Dubai following last week's men's tennis tournament in the emirate have been able to leave the UAE, the ATP announced on Wednesday.

Several high-profile players, including champion Daniil Medvedev, were unable to leave the country following the start of Israel's and the United States' war with Iran.

"The vast majority of players who were in Dubai have successfully departed today on selected flights," the ATP said. —*PTI*

PREMIER LEAGUE

Wolves stun lacklustre Liverpool with 2-1 win

LONDON, 4 MARCH

Last-place Wolverhampton stunned Premier League champion Liverpool with a 2-1 win at Molineux Stadium.

Brazilian midfielder Andre struck a deflected winner in the fourth minute of stoppage time on Tuesday night to deliver a blow to Liverpool's hopes of securing Champions League soccer next season.

It sent Wolves fans wild in a thrilling finish to the match.

"It is Liverpool Football Club. It doesn't matter the position we are in at the moment, whenever you beat them, you have to enjoy those moments," said Wolves manager Rob Edwards, who charged down the touchline in celebration after Andre's strike brought rare joy to a season that looks destined to end in relegation. A dramatic end to the game saw Mohamed Salah score in the 83rd minute, ending his 10-game league goal drought to equalize for Liverpool, soon after Rodrigo Gomes had put Wolves ahead in the 78th. As both teams went in search of a winner, Andre's long-range effort deflected off Joe Gomez and left Liverpool goalkeeper Alisson wrong-footed. "It feels amazing. It was an amazing game and an amazing night," said Rodrigo Gomes. It was Liverpool's ninth league defeat of the season and could see the defending champion drop to sixth place if Chelsea beats Aston Villa on Wednesday. The top four are guaranteed to qualify for the Champions League. Still, the Premier League is likely to earn a fifth bonus place because of English clubs' performances in Europe this season. —*PTI*

Liverpool's Hugo Ekitike in action with Wolverhampton Wanderers -PTI

Iraq confirms FIFA WC Playoffs to happen as per schedule

LONDON, 4 MARCH

The Iraqi national football team on Wednesday confirmed that the upcoming FIFA Intercontinental Playoff matches will be conducted as per schedule in Mexico on 31 March.

"The Iraqi National Team management confirms that it received official confirmation from FIFA today regarding the intercontinental playoff match qualifying for the 2026 World Cup. The match is scheduled to take place in Monterrey, Mexico, on the 31st March," the statement read.

Mexico is one of the three host countries for the June 11-July 19 FIFA World Cup, along with the United States and Canada. The country as a whole, but particularly Guadalajara, was shaken by the violence that followed the killing of the leader of the powerful Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG).

Guadalajara, the capital of Jalisco state, will host four group-stage matches. Mexico City and the northeastern city of Monterrey will also host games. —*PTI*